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**Moving on in Academia:  
Exploring the Career Experiences of Professors at a UK university**

**by**

**Ismi Arif Ismail**

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Continuing Education**



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
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## DECLARATION

This thesis is presented in accordance with the regulations for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. I declare that the work described in this thesis is original and my own, unless otherwise indicated. I confirm that this thesis has not been submitted for a degree at any university. The interpretations in this thesis are the sole responsibility of the researcher, and in no way represent the views of the university, nor of Warwick Institute of Education.

## ABSTRACT

This study was aimed at providing a better understanding of academic socialisation. Informed by a biographical research approach, the study explored the career experiences of 12 professors from 12 academic departments at a UK university through a series of in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviewing interviews, documentary analysis and a literature review. It set out to highlight how the academics in the study reflexively construct their academic identities and to provide some answers to the question: What is the history of how people have come to be professors?

This study suggests that the transformation of these individuals' identities as academics was the outcome of active participation in various communities of practice throughout their careers. Academics continuously learn to position themselves within the various communities of practice that they choose to participate in. The professors' career stories reveal how they make sense and negotiate their identities as academics through accommodating with the power relations, ideology, cultures and ways embedded within the communities of practice of which they are members. Instead of looking at academics as passive participants, the findings provide evidence of individuals' voluntarism and agency in constructing their academic identities.

This study contributes to the continuing discussion on academic socialisation through describing the experiences of academics moving through different stages in their careers. The in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviewing approach offers a fuller appreciation of the challenges and opportunities involved in academic socialisation. Demystifying the career experiences of academics may benefit others in academia in navigating their future career undertakings.

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# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

This thesis is a study of the lived experiences of academics moving through different stages in their careers. Informed by the in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviewing research approach, this study explores the career experiences of 12 professors from 12 academic departments at a UK university. The study involves documenting and analysing the individual academics' narratives of career stories through a series of in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviewing, documentary analysis and a literature review. Based on the Chicago School of Sociology's concept of career, which has both an objective and a subjective dimension, this study explores both the changes in roles and positions, and the transformation of the academic's identity. The notion of a career involves individuals' identifiable positions and statuses as well as their subjective experiences, the meanings that they attach to their experiences, and how they make sense of becoming a certain person (Goffman, 1961; Becker, 1963; Barley, 1989; Crossan et al., 2003).

### 1.1 Rationale and conceptual framework

This chapter provides an overview of the study by explaining the rationale and conceptual framework that underpin the study. It also describes my motivation for engaging in the study and discusses the significance of the research. The chapter then explains the aims of the research. Finally, the chapter outlines the thesis.



### **1.1.1 My biography and the impetus for engaging in this research**

- **From school to university**

Becoming an academic has always been my ambition since primary school. After finishing my primary and secondary education, I did a degree in education at the National University of Malaysia. I graduated in 1993 with an honours degree and started my teaching career at a secondary school. My interest in becoming an academic did not fade away. Instead, I began to think about moving into academia when the right opportunity came. After teaching for two years, I decided to further my studies as a part-time postgraduate student majoring in extension education. I completed my studies and in August 2000, left school and joined the university as a lecturer at the Department of Professional Development and Continuing Education.

- **Moving into academia**

Moving into academia raised a number of questions in my mind. I began to think about what needed to be done in order to survive and succeed in academia. Like other new academic entrants to the university, I underwent a one-to three-year probation period before getting a permanent post. As part of the academic induction process, I was assigned to work under a mentor, Professor Adam (a pseudonym). I also worked alongside a number of other senior colleagues in the department. The objective of providing this 'apprenticeship-like' probation period was to provide new academics with some early experiences on managing their teaching, research, administration and services to the community, both within and outside the university. I learnt a lot from this apprenticeship exercise.

- **Challenges in academia**

The encouragement of Professor Adam and my senior colleagues stimulated me towards becoming more creative, independent and autonomous within my workplace. I was gradually getting accustomed to taking more central roles in a number of research projects and conferences conducted by my department and the faculty. However, I experienced some career setbacks. Working in various research groups and conference committees provided me with fun, but also exposed me to the tensions that exist among academics. I could feel that I had received little recognition for the ways in which I tried to improve our existing way of doing research and organising conferences. Whereas these academics preferred to continue with what they had been doing for years, I was keen to try out new ideas. I was seen as trying to go against the existing culture practised in my department and faculty. Some of my colleagues and I did not work comfortably together. We had contrasting views about how to carry out our research and how to run successful conferences. I continued helping my colleagues in the department and the faculty, but with declining enthusiasm.

I got my permanent post after a year. After the probation period ended, I realised that most of my work and learning would now become more individualised. I constantly learnt through modelling other people's way of doing their jobs. What I found was that, when I modelled some activities and they did not go very well with the expectations of my colleagues and the 'invisible college' in my academic discipline, I was inclined not to repeat them again. I would try something else and see if that would work better. I think that modelling has helped me to develop my strategies because an academic career



enables me to do a lot of observation. I have just been able to watch my colleagues most of the time and analyse different approaches. I soon realised that my initial understanding of academic socialisation was limited to replicating what my senior colleagues were doing. It was a matter of reproducing the existing academic culture.

I was driven by a constant search for improvement, a striving for excellence, for myself and for my department. Some colleagues responded positively to my enthusiasm, but some turned down my requests and said that I was rather impatient in enacting my academic career. For them, career development in academia gradually evolves: it is not pre-planned. I also realised that some of my colleagues who belonged to a number of strong networks within the faculty had an advantage in developing their careers. Conversely, new arrivals who were excluded from these networks relied on self-directed efforts to learn about the process of becoming an academic. I sometimes felt as if I were a passive participant who should wait to be invited into these networks.

Such setbacks affected my enthusiasm. Occasionally, I experienced sudden reversals, from confidence and growth to decline and frustration. This forced me to reflect on my identity as an academic. I began to question how an academic progresses in his or her career. My earlier understanding about academic socialisation, which required proactive and planned efforts, had now been challenged by a more reactive stance. I believed that there was a diversity of approaches to academic socialisation but they are scarcely shared among academics.

I then had an opportunity to attend two courses organised by the staff development unit of my university. I hoped to learn more about becoming an academic. However, to my disappointment, the focus of the courses was limited to only preparing us to become effective university teachers. We were taught how to prepare a lesson plan and audio-visual aids, and how to deliver an effective lecture. Some of the university administrators who were invited to talk about university administration did discuss some aspects of academic careers. However, the focus was more on explaining the end product, the amount or the quantity of work to be produced for promotional purposes. Not much was said about the process of academic socialisation. Questions such as ‘How do you socialise and move on in academia?’ and ‘How do you interact with the culture of your academic discipline, your department, your faculty and your university?’ recurred in my mind. I soon realised that much of my learning about academic socialisation so far was isolated and unplanned. Nevertheless, wanting to know more, I believed that a better understanding of academic socialisation was vital to help new lecturers such as myself to understand how to socialise and to move on in academia.

I began exploring and questioning what it means to become an academic. I began exploring ways to further improve my work. I believed that career development in academia is a conscious effort and is not merely a passing of years. I wanted to engage in collaborative learning, consciously watching the way others developed their academic careers, and modelling what I saw as good practice.

My previous experience in school, how I planned to further my studies and change my career, stimulated me towards believing that an individual is able to influence his or her career progression. My struggle for identity in the workplace continued to grow. I realised that recognition was important in my career. I could see that identity formation and change involved the actions and perceptions of others in the workplace, as well as my self-perception. I believed that there was an interesting link among the academic community, power relations and academic socialisation. My experiences also revealed the importance of prior knowledge and skills brought to the workplace. However, the utilisation of those prior skills was not always straightforward. I tried to work in a team at the university and I realised that I could not simply transfer what I had learnt in school. Much of that prior experience was of value and useful, but not sufficient.

- **Getting the space to contribute**

In the year 2001, my university came up with 8 goals in its 2001-2010 development plan to become a 'world-class' university. Two of the eight goals involved developing and creating excellent human resources and professional environments at the university, and establishing the university as a centre of professional development services and continuing education with an international reputation. In doing so, the university set up two centres of excellence: namely a Centre for Professional Advancement and a Centre for Academic Development, which offer professional development and continuing education programmes to staff within and outside the university. My academic department was given the responsibility to assist these centres in fulfilling these goals. The stated strategies set by the centres for achieving the goals are: to retain and retrain



potential academics, to develop more professorial chairs and to establish appropriate academic ratios for each department, namely: 30% professors, 40% associate professors and 30% lecturers by the year 2010 (Universiti Putra Malaysia Development Plan, 2001). In one of our departmental meetings, it was proposed that there was a need for more studies on academic careers so that the centres and the university could use the findings as a database for its continuing professional education programmes. Inspired by the need to establish an appropriate ratio of professors in each academic department, I started thinking that a research project, which identified professors' career paths, could offer a better understanding on how these academics successfully progress through different stages in their careers. I submitted a proposal and was granted a scholarship to do a doctoral degree at the University of Warwick.

Interestingly, in 2004, the Malaysian government revamped its Ministry of Education and upgraded its higher education department into a Ministry of Higher Education. This ministry is responsible for the development and future direction of higher education in Malaysia. One of the ministry's agendas was to improve the quality of academics in Malaysia. The ministry was urgently requested to provide a more supportive environment which would encourage Malaysian academics to play more active roles within the international arena, and to strengthen their knowledge-seeking commitment through modelling the experiences of professors in the UK, the US and Japan (Ujang, 2004). I was struck by this development and believed that my research, which investigates professors' career experiences, could offer some contribution for academic development both in the UK and in Malaysia.

These developments had important implications for the empirical research to be done. They provided me with more space to expand my interest on researching academic socialisation. This study is specifically an investigation of academic socialisation with particular focus on identifying professors' career experiences. I was eager to examine the academic career from a sociological perspective because I wanted to understand it from the viewpoints of professors who had gone through different stages in their careers. The biographies of professors are valuable in revealing the experiences of academics moving on in academia. Academics and people working in academic development can learn a great deal from their experiences about what individuals and institutions need to do to develop academics.

Doing research on academic careers and socialisation is directly related to my country's and personal concern about the need to improve the quality of academics in Malaysia. From the commitment and experience collected during my university life as a student and an academic in Malaysia and in the UK, I was concerned about the need to study academics' experiences at different stages in their careers. Hence, the determination was developed to study the link between academic socialisation and the career experiences of how some people have come to be professors.

### **1.1.2 The conceptual framework**

In this study, I will use Lave and Wenger's (1991), and Wenger's (1998) work on communities of practice (COPs) to explore academics' experiences at different stages in their careers. Although Lave and Wenger's work is based on a study of apprenticeship, I



will apply their work to a new perspective by looking at the academic career as a process of lifelong ‘self-designed apprenticeship’ (Arthur et al., 1999). This conceptual framework is used to analyse and interpret how these academics gain access and recognition into their COPs in academia, how they sustain this recognition within the cultures of these COPs and, above all, how the whole participation process facilitates the formation of their academic identities. By using the COPs model (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) to explore the career experiences of academics at different stages in their careers, this thesis will argue that a successful academic career does not only depend on one’s academic and pedagogic qualifications, but also relies on one’s ability to socialise within the various COPs that one participates in.

## 1.2 The significance of the study

One way to develop the knowledge base of a profession is to study the professional’s own experience and practical generalisation, to make it more explicit, open to be shared, criticised and refined. (Eraut, 1985, p. 121)

Eraut’s (1985) concern about the significance of studying professionals’ own experience supports the need for this study. This thesis seeks to contribute to the continuing discussion on academic socialisation and to provide a better understanding of the academic career. The subject of the research is important because:

1. An exploration of academics’ career experiences enables readers to understand the subjective side of their professional lives. The professors’ autobiographical accounts describe how they have faced challenges in academic socialisation, the motivations

behind their decisions and actions, and explain the rationale for their successes and failures. An exploration of the career experiences of academics allows us to understand how they perceive themselves, and 'their sense of becoming a certain person' (Crossan et al., 2003, p. 56), psychologically, socially and professionally.

2. A better understanding of academic work is needed because the literature on academic careers, particularly on academic socialisation, has constantly raised the debate between nurture versus nature, and its relation to the construction of one's professional identity (Becher and Trowler, 2001). Whilst the older literature on higher education suggests that nature, social structure or the 'external forces' in the form of academic disciplines dominantly facilitate one's professional identity, later studies give more emphasis to nurture or 'individual agency' and look at an academic as a sculptor of his or her own academic identity. In addition, a third group of writers avoids this dichotomous view. Instead, they suggest that one's professional identity is formed through a dynamic construction between 'individual agency' and 'social structure' (Becher and Trowler, 2001). The findings of this thesis offer some insights into this continuing discussion on academic socialisation.
  
3. This study places a much greater emphasis on experienced academics. Whilst the literature that raises issues on academic socialisation is growing, a lot of writing has tended to be concerned chiefly with demystifying the experience of new faculty in becoming an academic (Boice, 1991; Mullen and Forbes, 2000; Trowler and Knight, 2000; Cawyer et al., 2002; Clark et al., 2002). Little has been researched on the lived

experiences of academics moving through different stages in their careers, particularly on professors (Tight, 2002, 2003). Furthermore, a number of studies of professors seem to centre on ‘professor as academic manager’, as in Middlehurst (1993), Richards (1997), and Prichard (2000). None of these studies explores the professors’ experiences of moving through different stages in their careers. Little is known about the ways in which these academics negotiate the gap between social expectations and subjective experience, and their capacity in developing their professional identities. The significance of this study, then, is not to provide a ‘how to become a professor’ kit, but primarily to demystify the ‘academic career journey’ experienced by people who have come to be professors.

### **1.2.1 Aims of the research**

Based upon a detailed exploration of the career experiences of academics at different stages in their careers, the thesis aims to uncover a new perspective towards researching academic work. By looking at the career experiences of academics at different stages in their careers, this thesis will argue that a successful academic career does not only depend on one’s academic and pedagogic qualifications, but also relies on one’s ability to constantly engage in a process entrenched in power relations, ideology and culture within various COPs which one participates in.

This research is also aimed at exploring how professors perceive and experience their academic socialisation, and provides evidence on how these individuals negotiate their identities in academia. As limited information is available on ‘the experiences of



academics at different stages in their careers' (Tight, 2003, p. 166), one of the major contributions of this thesis is to describe, to analyse and to present readers with a comprehensible idea of how academic careers are lived and expressed. The academics' autobiographical accounts will be used to provide a better understanding of the processes involved in academic socialisation.

### **1.2.2 The research questions**

The key questions underlying my research into professors' career experiences are:

1. What is the history of how people have come to be professors?
  - a. What is it like to become a professor?
  - b. What does becoming an academic mean to the professors?
  
2. How does academic identity get constructed? To what extent is academic identity formed as an individual project, to what extent does the individual academic play the roles that are strongly determined by his or her communities and institutions, and to what extent is academic identity a combination of both?
  
3. How does learning at work impact on the academic's identity and reputation?
  - a. To what extent does formal learning contribute to the construction of academic identity?
  - b. To what extent does informal learning contribute to the construction of academic identity?

4. How do communities of practice (COPs) in academia contribute to the construction of an academic's identity?
5. Based on their career experiences, what are the academics' perceptions towards the implementation of continuing professional development in academia?

### **1.3 Synopsis of the thesis**

This thesis consists of seven chapters, which are arranged so as to inform the reader about the background and theories used, the actual study and, finally, its implications. Chapter 1, the introduction, explains my personal and professional background, and the reason for choosing this area of study. Chapter 2 reviews the concepts of academic socialisation, organisational learning, academic identity and COPs, which form the theoretical underpinnings for this study. It also explains the development of the conceptual framework for the study. Chapter 3 explains the use of in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviewing research as the methodology of the study. It justifies the link between the conceptual framework and the choice of methodology, and details its strengths and weaknesses. Chapter 4 provides background information on the academics involved in the study, the research context and the research boundaries. It illustrates the professors' career stories based on their autobiographical accounts. These career stories provide the avenue for delineating their career experiences in moving through different stages in their careers. Chapters 5 and 6 explore these career experiences further. Chapters 5 and 6 together analyse, discuss and interpret these findings in relation to the research questions and the literature reviewed. Chapter 7 reviews the key findings of the



study, and concludes with a reflective commentary on the whole research process. Besides providing recommendations for practice and areas for further research, this chapter will also reaffirm the primary argument of the thesis that, besides one's academic and pedagogic qualifications, a successful academic career ultimately depends on one's ability to socialise within the various COPs which one participates in.

#### **1.4 Summary of the chapter**

The aim of this chapter has been to provide an overview of the study. It described the rationale and conceptual framework that support this study. It has also provided the justification for the research. The synopsis of the thesis provides the base for further exploration of the study, which will be dealt with in the following chapters.

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## CHAPTER 2

### The Literature Review

#### 2.0 Introduction

The previous chapter has explained my rationale for researching academic socialisation. Chapter 1 laid the foundation for this study by introducing the research problem and research questions and the conceptual framework. This chapter situates my study in a wider context by considering the literature associated with academic socialisation. Chapter 2 will explore how I arrive at my conceptual framework, which facilitates the research design of this study. There is a broad literature that relates to academic socialisation. This chapter focuses on the literature that has most relevance to this study, that is, professional socialisation, organisational/workplace learning and communities of practice (COPs).

This chapter is divided into eight sections. Following this introductory section, section 2.1 looks at general commentaries on professional socialisation. Section 2.2 discusses how professional socialisation works in academia. Section 2.3 describes the formation of professional and/or academic identity. Section 2.4 looks at how the professional socialisation process relates to organisational/workplace learning. Section 2.5 explains how academic socialisation can be examined using the COPs model. Section 2.6 discusses previous studies that link professional socialisation, organisational/workplace learning and COPs from different contexts: namely general organisations and educational

institutions. Section 2.7 defines the research and theoretical gaps. Finally, section 2.8 is a summary of the chapter.

## **2.1 General commentaries on professional socialisation**

Moving into the academic workforce can be interesting as well as challenging. Becoming a member of academia involves a process termed as professional socialisation. Professional socialisation is defined as ‘the process by which people selectively acquire the values and attitudes, the interests, skills and knowledge – in short, the culture – current in groups to which they are, or seek to become a member’ (Merton et al., 1957, p. 278). Like the processes of primary and secondary socialisation, experienced during childhood and while adjusting oneself into becoming a member of a larger society, professional socialisation also involves the relationship between individual agency and the structure that exists within the society (Clouder, 2003). Agency is a term used to explain an individual’s capacity to act intentionally (Bandura, 1997). Structure refers to any arrangement of institutionalised rules and resources implicated in the reproduction of social systems or practices (Giddens, 1989; Jary and Jary, 2000). Professional socialisation scholars continue to argue about how individual interacts with external forces (nature or social structure), or how he or she learns to socialise.

### **2.1.1 Socialisation as internalisation**

A number of views have been put forward to suggest how professional socialisation or ‘the process of becoming a member of a profession’ takes place. One of the early views of professional socialisation links it to a process, which strongly shapes individuals into



becoming a member. Some studies, which championed this structural perspective towards professional socialisation, were carried out within the field of medical education (Merton et al., 1957) and teacher's careers (Riseborough, 1981). These empirical works represent medical students and teachers, as 'passive recipients of knowledge and skills' (Eraut, 1994; Clouder, 2003, p. 215), and as rule-following puppets of the social system surrounding them. An example of such a structural understanding describes how socialisation at schools facilitates 'teachers and pupils [to] become mere passive ciphers ideologically subjugated by factors outside themselves playing on and through them' (Riseborough, 1981, p. 8). Newcomers enter their professions and experience socialisation merely as a sculpture, ready to be carved and shaped by their co-workers and other social artefacts afforded by their organisations. 'Newcomers are taught to see the organisational world as do their experienced colleagues' (Van Maanen and Schein, 1979, p. 211) so as to maintain the existing practice of the organisation.

### **2.1.2 Socialisation as interaction**

However, an interactionist perspective, such as the works of the Chicago School of Sociology scholars, such as Howard Becker and Anselm Strauss, provide another way of embracing professional socialisation. Becker et al. (1961) who studied medical students identified how these students use personal agency to develop their own sub-culture or course of actions and thrive within the structures formed by the professional socialisation process. Olesen and Whittaker's (1968) study on student nurses also challenges this passive rule-following view of socialisation and indicates how the respondents used their own strategies while undergoing the training programme. Whilst maintaining the notion



of a general standard in professional socialisation, these studies highlighted the evidence of individuals' creativity in undertaking the process. Other studies on professional socialisation of teachers also demonstrate examples where these individuals productively employ some creative and strategic responses in performing their roles within the constraints set by their society and their current situations (Hargreaves, 1977; Lacey, 1977; Ball and Lacey, 1980; Pollard, 1982; Goodson, 1983; Ball and Goodson, 1985). Similar views about socialisation as interaction has also been used to explain the existence of departmental sub-cultures in universities (Becher, 1989; Trowler, 1998; Delamont et al., 2000; Becher and Trowler, 2001, Clouder, 2003).

Evidence of creativity and strategic responses represent professional socialisation as a process of interaction between individuals and their social structures. One of the important aspects in socialisation is the need for recognition and respect from others in the social system or structure. One has to follow the rules as one way of socialising but, at the same time, the rules should not limit one's creativity to contribute. Goffman (1971) argues that complete autonomy is impossible in socialisation, and introduces the discipline of impression management in which a person may adjust their appearance and action to suit a particular situation. Similarly, Giddens (1991) discusses the importance of considering others' expectations in order for an individual's action to be accepted as one of the ways of doing things (Gauntlett, 2002). Both Goffman (1971) and Bourdieu (1993) view the individual as a dynamic agent who continuously improvises and adapts rather than one who is being moulded by the social structure (Clouder, 2003).

Closely related to this view is the stance proposed by symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionists believe that individuals have the capacity to interpret and interact within their surroundings (Bucher and Stelling, 1977). From the symbolic interactionist's point of view, individual professionals manage the structure and/or agency relationship and progress within the professional socialisation process through developing a unique as well as a collective way of doing things. Individuals carry their self and social identities together in all actions. Collective and shared understanding generated through social interaction with others constantly makes up the practice by which individuals live and as professional practices continuously evolve, the rules and/or structures are likely to be constantly negotiated and changed (Bucher and Stelling, 1977, Clouder, 2003). In other words, structures not only constrain but also enable professionals to change and improve their practices in the course of time.

Symbolic interactionists acknowledge the importance of structures that shape people's lives and individuals' action and creativity to perform their roles accordingly. Within this interaction, learning takes place while identities are constructed and reconstructed. A key figure in symbolic interactionism, George Herbert Mead (1934) suggests two dimensions of the self: the active 'I' and the reflexive 'me'. The 'me' constantly evaluates one-self and the others, whereas the 'I' explores and takes action based on the evaluation. In other words, the 'I' represents the creative dimension of one's self to complement the reactive side of 'me'. According to Blumer (1969, p. 2), the basic assumptions of symbolic interactionism include:



- Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings these things have for them.
- The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction one has with others.
- These meanings are handled in and modified through an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters.

Closely related to symbolic interactionism and professional socialisation is the Chicago School of Sociology's concept of career, which encompasses the objective as well as the subjective dimensions. The objective dimension of a career refers to individual's movement between one's identifiable positions, statuses and situations whereas the subjective dimension refers to the individual's subjective experience, the meanings they attribute to their experiences, their identity development and their sense of becoming a certain person (Barley, 1989; Arthur et al., 1999; Crossan et al., 2003). Another key element in the Chicago School of Sociology's analysis of careers is the idea of moving across 'status passages', whereby people make the transition from one social role to another, through formal and informal events at different stages in their lives (Barley, 1989). Such status passages represent the outcomes of socialisation, which may take place throughout one's life. The Chicago sociologists' interest in exploring people's lives in detail led them to embrace and develop a methodology known as the life history. The use of life histories and autobiographies as documents of careers flourished at the University of Chicago especially with the publication of several famous work such as Thomas and Znaniecki's (1927): *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* which



researched Polish peasants' migrating experience and Clifford Shaw's (1930): *The Jack-Roller*, which documented juvenile's autobiographies. However, according to Barley (1989) and recently reiterated by Arthur et al. (1999), a considerable amount of current research using the traditional view of career still tended to see it merely as a series of identifiable jobs and positions, and overlooked the subjective dimension, which includes one's professional identity development. Thus, it is possible to suggest that an exploration on professional socialisation using the Chicago School of Sociology's tradition combined with a biographical approach might provide an in-depth understanding of both objective and subjective dimensions of a career.

In short, socialisation process does not only influence one's identifiable career progression but also develops one's identity as a professional. The socialisation process constantly modifies individuals' views of their professions to become clearer and more meaningful and in the course of their careers, individuals acquire the skills together with a set of beliefs and values about their professional lives (Bucher and Stelling, 1977). The earlier discussion which outlines the differing views between socialisation as internalisation and socialisation as interaction raises a number of questions about the development of a professional identity: How does it get constructed? To what extent is identity formed as an individual project and to what extent is the individual being absorbed through performing the roles that are strongly determined by his or her surroundings? To address these questions, I will explore the professional socialisation process by situating it within the context of academia.

## 2.2 Professional socialisation in academia

Is it that particular kinds of people choose certain sorts of disciplines and bring particular things with them, or is it rather that disciplines shape and condition their adherents into becoming particular kinds of people? (Becher and Trowler, 2001, p. 131)

Academics need to engage with this contestation about work and roles, and struggle to create, or at least shape, their identities, rather than simply be shaped by external forces. (Rowland, 2002, p. 54)

As suggested by these two quotations, similar to the generic literature on professional socialisation, research and theorising about academic socialisation also raises a number of debates including the argument between nurture (the individual agency of an academic) versus nature (the social structures formed by one's academic discipline and institutions) and how they shape and influence the construction of one's professional and/or academic identity (Becher and Trowler, 2001). In a similar vein, Rowland (2002) voices his concern for academics to use their individual agency in developing their identities as academics, and not to be strongly shaped and overwhelmed by the social structures around them.

Becher and Trowler's work on academic socialisation continue Becher's original study on 'academic tribes and territories' (Becher, 1989; Becher and Trowler, 2001). They studied various academic disciplines that build up the landscape of knowledge in higher education. Becher's (1989) novel work on academic discipline, which explored the culture, tradition and norms of each subject area, was carried out with academics from 12 academic subjects in 18 higher education institutions in the United Kingdom and the



United States. Trowler expanded Becher's work through his research on universities in the United Kingdom and Canada (Becher and Trowler, 2001).

Becher and Trowler (2001) outline the existence of three different views towards describing the academic socialisation process. The older literature on higher education suggests that nature and/or social structure for example, academic disciplines strongly facilitate one's professional identity. In other words, an academic is more like a sculpture of his or her academic discipline (Crane, 1972; Clark, 1987; Becher and Trowler, 2001). The early literature views social structure as important in shaping the individual's academic identity. According to Clark (1987, p. 2), 'The academic profession is shaped by many social settings'. Clark (1987, p. 278) further acknowledges the existence of distinctive norms and cultures of each academic discipline which in turn dominantly shape how academics socialise and develop their professional identities:

The academic profession has long been a holding company of sorts, a secondary framework composed of persons who are objectively located in diverse fields, and who develop beliefs accordingly.... Around distinctive intellectual tasks, each discipline has a knowledge tradition, categories of thought and related codes of conduct... there is in each field a way of life into which new members are gradually inducted.

In this earlier literature, individual academics are viewed as being absorbed into the academic career. In this context, new faculty are seen as rather passive and reactive to the social structure set by the surrounding including institutions and academic disciplines. In particular, academic socialisation is viewed as a process of 'indoctrination'.



A second view gives more preference to nurture or 'individual agency' and look at an academic as more of a sculptor of his or her own academic identity (Tierney, 1997; Knight and Trowler, 1999; Valimaa, 1998; Becher and Trowler, 2001). This view emphasises individual agency as the dominant factor and perceives academic socialisation and identity development as depending highly on the individual's proactive learning and self-directed efforts. For example, Tierney (1997) and Knight and Trowler (1999) highlight how new and experienced academics' self-initiated mutual learning facilitate their academic socialisation process.

Interestingly, Prichard (2000) and Parker (2000), who represent the third view, avoid this dichotomous stance and instead argue that academics' professional identities or 'professional and personal subjectivities' are formed through a dynamic construction between 'individual agency' and 'social structure' (Becher and Trowler, 2001). Based on his research on academic managers in four universities and four further education colleges in the United Kingdom, Prichard (2000) shows how individuals use their personal agency to manage the changing experience of academic work and adapt to the new practice. Instead of being absorbed into the new practice, Prichard (2000) suggests that the academic managers' identity is a dynamic formation between their biographies (personal and professional) and the changing work practice.

### **2.3 Becoming an academic: The construction of one's professional identity**

The three differing views discussed earlier represent academic socialisation as a process of interaction between individuals and their social structures. The debate between

individual agency and social structure are closely linked to the construction of one's identity as a professional. Professional identity is about the knowledge and skills one possesses, the work one is committed to, and how one's work is related to others within and outside one's profession (Bucher and Stelling, 1977). Individuals constantly develop their competence and their professional identities throughout their careers. Besides becoming competent professionals, individuals learn to 'think, act and feel' (Merton et al., 1957, p. 7) as members of the profession. Individuals develop their professional identities through evaluating their everyday work practices, observing their colleagues and judging their own performances in order to improve themselves and become competent practitioners (Bucher and Stelling, 1977). In academia, mentoring and networking are examples of academic socialisation that provide the venue for both new and experienced academic to evaluate and develop their mastery and professional identities (Knight and Trowler, 1999; Mullen and Forbes, 2000; Cawyer et al., 2002). The experience of mastery is important in professional socialisation and identity development processes (Bucher and Stelling, 1977).

Many researchers have investigated the relationship between academic socialisation and the construction of academic identity. Henkel's (2000) study looks into the link between identity construction and the changing nature of academic work. The research was carried out in 11 higher education institutions in the United Kingdom. Using academics' experience of the Teaching Quality Assessment and the Research Assessment Exercise introduced in the United Kingdom higher education system, Henkel (2000, p. 13) explores 'the extent to which major change in the politics and structures of higher

education has also meant major change in what it means to be an academic in the UK'. Using a communitarian concept of academic identity, Henkel (2000, p. 16) views an academic as:

- the distinctive individual, the subject of a unique narrative history.
- the distinctive individual, located in a chosen moral and conceptual framework.
- the distinctive individual, identified by the goods he or she has achieved.
- the embedded individual, emergent from, working within and making an individual contribution to communities and/or institutions with their own languages, conceptual structures, histories, traditions, myths, values, practices and achieved goods; communities and institutions provide the bounded space within which the individual works.
- the embedded individual as inheriting scripts for the fulfilment of a range of roles from the communities and institutions of which he or she is a member.

According to Henkel (2000, p.16) 'The concepts of distinctiveness and embeddedness can be understood as compatible, indeed mutually reinforcing, within communitarian philosophies; identity is thus represented as a social as well as an individual construct'.

Using Giddens's (1991, p. 5) terms like 'duality' and 'the reflexive project of the self', Henkel (2000) suggests that an academic is both a distinctive and an embedded individual. On one hand, the distinctive individual develops his or her commitment within an identified, core subject area or conceptual framework. On the other hand, the



embedded individual also builds up his or her commitment as a member of various 'knowledge communities' (Henkel, 2000) which bring with them various social structures, languages, practices and cultures. This is when an academic identity connotes a combination of both individual and social identities. Academic socialisation involves continuous learning throughout one's career. Individual academics constantly construct and reconstruct their individual and social identities in becoming a member of various communities. This membership ranges from their relationships with individuals, the invisible college or the disciplinary-based communities, their department and institution to the external academic communities like the public at large. The membership at various levels provides the individual scholar with psychological success alongside the recognition gained from other members in their various 'knowledge communities' (Henkel, 2000).

Taylor (1999, p. 40) who also acknowledges that an academic is a member of various communities sees academic identity 'as multi-level, achievements and discipline focused'. He distinguishes three levels of academic identity namely as a member of a department, an academic discipline and a general public (Taylor, 1999). Thus, academics have to construct their identities within the structure and rules formed by the academic and the general communities. This unified identity provides the academics with a sense of recognition and achievement throughout their careers. Successful identity work enables the academics to continue and sustain their commitment to the profession.

However, similar to the conclusion made by Clark (1987) and Becher and Trowler (2001) on academic career, Henkel's illustrative findings point out a constant link between the identities and careers of the academics and their academic disciplines. As discussed earlier, Becher (1989) and Becher and Trowler (2001) highlight that academic socialisation involves an academic's growing reputation within one's academic discipline. Becher (1989) recommends that academics' loyalty to their discipline is much stronger than their loyalty to their institutions. These studies depict the significance and the influence of the varied customs, practices and methodological convention of each academic discipline to the way academic communities, namely lecturers and students, teach, learn, interact and develop their respective careers.

Using Henkel's (2000) work, Kogan (2000, p. 210) suggests that, 'people are stronger not only because of their expertise and their own moral and conceptual frameworks, but also by performing a range of roles, which are strongly determined by the communities and institutions of which they are members'. Academic identity will grow and develop within an individual's self-confidence of his or her established discipline or subject area (Kogan, 2000). Being in an established discipline enables academics to engage with the systematic processes of knowledge creation, dissemination and utilisation. This systematic knowledge culture brings in an established system of recognising and promoting the works of its members. Kogan (2000, p. 216) provides an interesting view towards academic identity when he suggests that:



Thus, I see individual identity, its institutional and subject settings and the world outside the university as separate but linked entities, giving each other support not by the assumed sharing of values implied by 'community' but through negotiation and exchange.

Like Kogan (2000), Malcolm and Zukas, (2000) view academic identity development as a situated learning process that should be facilitated within established disciplinary cultures. Individual academics develop their identities through performing various roles which are formed by the cultures of the academic disciplines and the professional communities that they participate in. Although academic identity also involves one's loyalty to the institution, Malcolm and Zukas (2000) criticise some formal academic development programmes that are too generic and detached from the knowledge and culture of each academic discipline. Using Lave and Wenger's (1991) COPs model, they suggest that 'becoming an academic' is a process embedded 'in a cultural, historical, and social context' (Malcolm and Zukas, 2000, p. 56). They also recommend that linking academic development with the disciplinary cultures would enhance the efforts of building up strong academic communities. In other words, legitimate peripheral participation in academia primarily involves learning to understand and make use of the language and culture of one's academic discipline (Malcolm and Zukas, 2000). Using Vygotsky's (1978) idea of 'language as a tool for constructing social understandings and consciousness within a community' (Malcolm and Zukas, 2000, p. 53), their suggestion is consistent with the conclusions made by Brew (1995) and Trowler (1998) on the need to provide academic development programme that cater to the needs of each academic department. Trowler (1998) makes this conclusion based on his research on how



academics working at a UK university experienced and responded to the changing nature of their academic work practice.

The emphasis on the significance of academic discipline in facilitating academics' identity development echoes the influential voice of Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu's famous book, *Homo Academicus* (1988), which focused on academics in France, provides a general framework for discussing and analysing the process of socialisation in academia. His idea of 'cultural capital' emphasised that each academic discipline has its own way of valuing and forming its traditions and culture (Delamont et al., 2000). An individual academic should understand and interact with the culture of his or her discipline so as to strive for distinction in his or her career. Bourdieu (1988, p. 105) writes that:

The surest guarantee of academic order, inextricably social and scientific, doubtless lies in the complex mechanisms whereby promotion towards the summit of the temporally dominant institutions goes hand in hand with progress in academic initiation, masked, in the case of the medical faculties, by successive competitive examinations...or, in the case of the art faculties, by the long wait for the doctorate, that is, in both cases, by an enforced prolongation of the dispositions which have been acknowledged through the primitive procedures of cooperation, and which hardly encourage heretical breaks with the artfully intertwined knowledge and power of academic orthodoxy.

Bourdieu depicts academic life as a contested terrain where academics constantly strive towards distinction through the investment of time (Bourdieu, 1988). In other words, academic socialisation is a process of investing one's time to learn and master the culture of one's academic discipline. The accumulated cultural capital enables an individual academic to develop his or her 'habitus', that is 'habitual patterns of disposition and practice that constitute cultural forms and values' (Delamont et al., 2000, p. 7), suitable to

his or her academic discipline. Bourdieu acknowledges that each academic discipline has its own distinctive culture and habitus. Supplementing Bourdieu's idea of habitus, Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004, p. 174) define it as 'a largely internalised, subconscious battery of dispositions that orientate a person's actions in any situation'.

Furthermore, another of Bourdieu's significant idea in discussing professional socialisation is his analogy of 'the field' and 'the game' (Bourdieu, 1984, 1988; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). The field here can be referred to the academic discipline and the academic profession. Each player possesses different amounts of capital 'spanning "cultural capital" (competence in making sense of cultural relations and artefacts), "symbolic capital" (intellectual ability; for instance degrees and award) and "social capital" (personal relationships)' (Arthur et al., 1999, p. 158), which are used to play the game and interact within the rules formed by their COPs. Whilst recognising the power of culture and discipline, Bourdieu's idea of 'playing the game' views socialisation not as a form of an internalisation but more as an interaction. This means that professional socialisation enables individuals, who are supported by their forms of capital, to conform as well as to improve and develop existing structures implemented within their COPs. Similarly, in the field of career, Arthur et al. (1999) use Bourdieu's cultural, symbolic and social capitals to explain their knowing-why, knowing-how and knowing whom components of their 'career capital'. For Arthur et al. (1999), career capital refers to individual's career competencies accumulated throughout one's career and they argue that individuals use their career capital to master their work practice and develop their professional identities.



Inspired by Bourdieu's work in *Homo Academicus*, Delamont et al. (2000) investigated how doctoral students from various academic disciplines are being socialised into becoming future academics and researchers. Based on interviews conducted with research students and academics (supervisors) from a number of universities in the UK, they present how different academic disciplines, for example, laboratory science, computer science and anthropology, provide different experiences, practices or customs of doctoral research for their students. The authors suggest that academic socialisation involves understanding not only the content of the subject but also the experience of the everyday realities of how to socialise and to behave as a laboratory scientist, a computer scientist or an anthropologist.

Therefore, becoming an academic involves more than learning to master one's subject area or academic discipline. Academic socialisation also involves learning and acquiring the 'culture of the discipline' (Delamont et al., 2000, p. 1). Bloor and Dawson (1994, p. 276) define culture as 'a patterned system of perceptions, meanings, and beliefs about the organisation which facilitates sense-making amongst a group of people sharing common experiences and guides individual behaviour at work.' They added that culture normally serves actions:

Individuals in organisations do not 'sense make' in isolation, but rather rely heavily upon observing the behaviour of others in social settings, and upon the shared meanings others give to that behaviour. Moreover, whilst people may act in new ways in response to new interpretations of events, there is a bias towards those patterns of interacting, which have been successful in the past (for both individuals and groups) (Bloor and Dawson, 1994, p. 278).



In a similar vein, Knight and Trowler (2000) highlight the significance of a rich organisational culture to facilitate the academic socialisation process among academics and students. They suggest that academic socialisation requires individuals to engage in both formal and informal learning activities afforded by each COP (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) that they are in. They argue that learning through participation in these activities enabled the individuals to practice and subconsciously learn and master the embedded and tacit knowledge of academic work, which are vital in facilitating their induction and socialisation as academics and students.

In short, the earlier discussions illustrate how socialisation theory evolves from regarding the individual merely as a passive or reactive being, to a dynamic individual who continuously interacts within the social structure formed by communities and organisations. Individuals maintain, modify and reshape social structures that construct them simultaneously. In the same manner, researching people's experiences of being socialised into and throughout their careers would help us to understand how they learn to become a member of a profession. In this study, I acknowledge that an individual academic is a member of a department, an academic discipline and a general public. Hence, whilst recognising that academic identity development primarily revolves around one's academic discipline, this study will also consider how other forms of social structures such as higher education institutions, professional associations and the general public jointly contribute to the process.

For the purpose of this study, this review will primarily focus on organisational/workplace learning and identity construction, as these are the main areas of interest to this study. The study of organisational life through the field of organisational or workplace learning, which investigates the everyday experiences of individuals at work, could offer an understanding into how academic socialisation facilitates identity work.

## **2.4 Organisational/Workplace learning**

This section seeks to discuss the development of the literature on organisational/workplace learning which is most relevant to this study. The literature on organisational/workplace learning has introduced two related metaphors, which have undergone continuous debate. The metaphors are learning as a process of knowledge acquisition and learning as a process of participation in communities of practice (COPs) (Elkjaer, 2004).

### **2.4.1 From learning as acquisition to learning as participation**

The literature on workplace learning used to view learning as a form of acquisition of knowledge, information and skills through formal instruction and training (March and Simon, 1958; Senge, 1990; Argyris and Schon, 1996; Elkjaer, 2004). From this perspective, learning fundamentally involves the acquisition of knowledge that is explicit and codified in nature, emanating from data, facts and practical knowledge gathered and documented by experienced practitioners in any field. Knowledge is acquired through the accumulation of data, facts and practical knowledge in one's mind, which functions like a

‘container’ (Elkjaer, 2004). Thus, concepts, knowledge and skills are considered to be ‘out there’, divided between the person and the context (Rogoff, 1995).

The ‘learning as acquisition’ metaphor treats the individual’s mind as a container that needs to be filled and refilled with substance from formal instruction (Elkjaer, 2004). For example, Senge (1990) encourages organisational members/learners to use their abstract thinking to process concepts and knowledge, and to adjust the structure of their minds so that they can jointly develop a learning organisation. However, this view of learning, based on a formal education mode, was criticised for focusing too much on the individual’s mind at the expense of the action of the whole person.

Another perspective on organisational/workplace learning presents the importance of participation in COPs (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Instead of acquiring knowledge within a classroom situation, learners learn through interacting and working with others in their daily lives. Participating within specific socio-cultural settings generates learning (Vygotsky, 1962; Engestrom, 1987; Suchman, 1987; Lave, 1988; Bruner, 1991; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Chaiklin and Lave, 1993; Wertsch et al., 1995; Wenger, 1998; Engestrom, 2001).

Rather than putting learning and acquisition of work-related knowledge in peoples’ minds, the participation perspective places learning as one way of becoming a participant in a COP (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Learning involves some changes in the identity of the participant. Learning is a way of understanding as well as participating



in the social world (Hanks, 1991; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Gherardi and Nicolini, 2002). Learning through participation allows an individual to work with others and simultaneously contribute to the practice.

As a participant in COPs, the individual discovers the habitual way to behave, namely, ‘what to do, when to do it, how to do it according to routines and using specific artefacts, and then how to give a reasonable account of why it was done’ (Gherardi and Nicolini, 2002, p. 194). Through connecting to others, learning becomes a social practice. Knowledge is situated within each COP, and not just a substance codified and kept in written form or in peoples’ minds. To master the knowledge or to become a ‘competent practitioner’ (Brown and Duguid, 1991) requires one to participate and to act within a COP rather than merely to think and to conceptualise. Hence, learning involves both the individual and the community (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Gherardi and Nicolini, 2002).

## **2.5 Academic socialisation and the communities of practice model**

In reviewing the literature on academic socialisation and reflecting on my own experience, I noted that my academic induction had been conducted based on the perception of learning as a form of knowledge acquisition. We were taught in a classroom situation how to become an effective university teacher. We exchanged information with our formal mentor on ‘what to do and what not to do as an academic’ for six months, and that was all. After the probation period, most of us were considered to

be ready to move on with our academic career. This understanding views academic socialisation as unproblematic and as a smooth transition from novice to full practitioner.

My primary aim in this study is to question this assumption and instead suggest that academic socialisation is not a simple transmission of knowledge or values in the form of acquisition. Academics have to understand how to socialise and to cope with the everyday realities of becoming an academic in order to succeed. In adopting this perspective, I highlight the importance of empirical research to explore how professionals learn, cope and successfully move through different stages in their careers. Researching their experiences is important because the findings can provide a better understanding of academic socialisation.

In suggesting academic socialisation as a form of situated learning, I join a number of authors who view learning as a form of participation and interaction within specific socio-cultural settings (Vygotsky, 1962; Bruner, 1991; Engestrom, 1987; Suchman, 1987; Lave, 1988; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Chaiklin and Lave, 1993; Wertsch et al., 1995; Wenger, 1998; Engestrom, 2001), and I am using the communities of practice model (COPs) (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) as a conceptual framework for understanding academic socialisation.

With its significant focus connecting participation within work practice to identity construction, I believe that each COP provides the venue to explore how individuals

experience the professional socialisation process throughout different stages in their careers. Lave and Wenger's (1991) model of COPs originates from a social theory of learning. A COP is:

...a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice. A community of practice is an intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge, not least because it provides the interpretative support necessary for making sense of its heritage. Thus, participation in the cultural practice in which any knowledge exists is an epistemological principle of learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 98)

A COP is 'formed among people whose interaction effects "mutual engagement", "a negotiated enterprise", and "a repertoire of negotiable resources" accumulated over time' (Wenger, 1998, p. 126). These three dimensions of a COP establish to what extent an individual is 'a competent participant, an outsider or somewhere in between' (Wenger, 1998, p. 137). In a more detailed explanation, the three dimensions are:

- "Mutuality of engagement", which denotes the ability to engage with other members and respond in kind to their actions, and thus the ability to establish relationships in which this mutuality is the basis for an identity of participation.
- "Accountability to the enterprise", which means the ability to understand the enterprise of a community of practice deeply enough to take some responsibility for it and contribute to its pursuit and to its ongoing negotiation by the community.



- “Negotiability of the repertoire”, that is the ability to make use of the repertoire of the practice to engage in it. This requires enough participation (personal or vicarious) in the history of a practice to recognise it in the elements of its repertoire. Then it requires the capability and the legitimacy to make this history newly meaningful. (Wenger, 1998, p. 137)

Within these three dimensions, a COP indicates a practice that jointly connects working, learning and sharing information. Studies on career and organisational socialisation have developed the similar concepts of occupational community and career community (Bell and Staw, 1989; Gherardi and Nicolini, 2002; Parker et al., 2004). Both occupational and career communities provide the environment and resources for professional socialisation of members and the sustainability of their cultures and practices. Interestingly, a COP does not necessarily ‘correspond either to the formal structuring of an organisation or to an informal structuring of friendship networks’ (Gherardi and Nicolini, 2002, p. 196), as the connecting point primarily relies on shared and mutual interests.

In a COP, learning becomes an important activity which sustains the primary practice. Learning is a form of social engagement (Ball, 2003). Learning through participation occurs when members meet and communicate with each other. ‘Such participation shapes not only what we do but also who we are and how we interpret what we do’ (Wenger, 1998, p. 4). The meeting and communication provide the avenue for members to share their experiences, reflect and eventually strengthen or modify any rules and norms of participating that may have developed throughout their relationships. ‘It is the

combination of membership and the mutual engagement in shared activity that is essential in learning' (Wenger, 1998, pp. 138-139). Learning is 'a way of being in the social world, not a way of coming to know about it' (Hanks, 1991, p. 24).

The three dimensions underlying a COP, namely, 'mutual engagement, accountability to an enterprise and negotiability of a repertoire' (Wenger, 1998, pp. 152-153) provide the focus for further analysis. The themes to be explored include gaining access, developing mastery, negotiating recognition and developing a reputation, and finally renewing and positioning identity through a dynamic interaction between one's individual agency and the social structure.

### **2.5.1 Learning in communities of practice and the construction of identity**

According to Lave and Wenger (1991), and Wenger (1998), learning through participation and 'the sense of becoming' involve the continuous construction of one's identity within various COPs. Learning in COPs involves the acquisition and recognition of one's identity as a participant. It is not about acquiring cognitive knowledge and skills and storing these in one's mind. 'The socialisation and learning processes that enable novices to become members of a community have been described in terms of "legitimate peripheral participation"' (Gherardi and Nicolini, 2002, p. 197). Legitimate peripheral participation enables new practitioners to take part in the actual everyday work practice. However, 'peripheral' denotes having a limited degree of contribution and responsibility for the outcome of the task. From this process, the learner gains recognition as a member

of a community. Hence, this membership allows one to have the sense of belonging, engagement, inclusiveness and identity as a participant.

Legitimate peripheral participation refers to the engagement of new arrivals in the community and the word 'peripheral' indicates a route or a way in which the new member must go along with in order to engage themselves with the community's established members (Gherardi and Nicolini, 2002). Simultaneously, the various ways of learning must link to the community's practice as a whole. In a similar vein, Cawyer et al. (2002) who view academic socialisation as a cultural process suggest that novice academics and new faculty must actively participate within the socialisation experience to be successful. According to Lave and Wenger (1991), learning is seen as an act of belonging and requires involvement and contribution to develop the community. Participation within COPs becomes a venue where both the new and the experienced member learn from each other and simultaneously develop their understanding of the profession.

Communities of practice have histories and developmental cycles...knowing is inherent in the growth and transformation of identities and it is located in relations among practitioners, their practice, the artefacts of that practice, and the social organisation and political economy of communities of practice. (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 122)

This process is socially constructed, 'takes place in a social world... and dialectically constituted in social practices' (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 123). Wenger's later work (1998) further elaborates this social construction through 'the mutual constitution of identity and community' (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2003, p. 5).



Becoming a full participant involves learning to understand how to participate and to negotiate one's identity. Fairly similar to Bourdieu's idea of 'field and the game' (Bourdieu, 1988; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), Lave and Wenger (1991) suggest that participation in a practice requires an individual to engage and play a professional language game through mastering the rules and gradually being able to use them appropriately.

Absorbing and being absorbed in the 'culture of practice'...might include [knowing] who is involved, what they do, what everyday life is like, how masters talk, walk, work, and generally conduct their lives, how people who are not part of the community of practice interact with it, what other learners are doing, and what learners need to learn to become full practitioners. It includes an increasing understanding of how, when, and about what old-timers collaborate, collude, and collide, and what they enjoy, dislike, respect, and admire. In particular it offers exemplars (which are grounds and motivation for learning activity), including masters, finished products, and more advanced apprentices in the process of becoming full practitioners. (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 95)

The language and action continuously shape the practice or the professional game. Within a COP, language is not only a medium of knowledge transmission but also conceived as the medium of culture (Vygotsky, 1978; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992). As such, language and action facilitate learning, 'interaction [and identity negotiation] among individuals in a specific occupational and organisational culture' (Gherardi and Nicolini, 2002, p. 196).

### **2.5.2 Generational encounters and multiple levels of membership**

The notion of legitimate participation and the concept of communities also imply that there exist various conflicts in the learning process. This idea depicts the process of multiple levels of membership and ‘generational encounters’ (Wenger, 1998; Down and Revely, 2004), and how a mixture of these various levels simultaneously affects the development of each member in a COP. Any changes or adjustments made by the participant to the existing social structure can be seen as a way of developing and also challenging the established knowledge (Gherardi and Nicolini, 2002). This challenge or development can affect the ‘unequal relations of power’ (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 42) negotiated among participants within a social context. Similarly, Garrick’s (1999) study of human resource developers’ informal learning at work also indicates how participants’ learning are facilitated by some forms of context-bound power relationship encircled within their workplaces. Billett (2001) suggests on the need for some forms of ‘guided learning through work’ as part of dealing with the unequal relations of power that exist in a COP. The guided learning through work could assist participants in managing ‘those factors within work practice that either facilitate or constrain individual’s participation in work and consequently their learning’ (Billett, 2001, p. 20).

Within this perspective, individual participants undertake roles as ‘masters’ and as ‘novices’ at different times and in different tasks (Ball, 2003). We are not ‘the master’ at all times or ‘the novice’ in all tasks. Each member shares his or her experience and competence of membership and eventually learns from others to develop his or her skills and mastery. ‘This is a process of engagement and socio-cultural renewal’ (Lave and

Wenger, 1991, p. 29). Fuller and Unwin (2003) relate this sharing of experience to Wenger's 'work of the imagination' within a COP. The work of imagination within a COP enables participants to 'imagine and be in someone else's shoes' (Wenger, 1998, p. 185) in the process of developing their work practice. The recognition of novices by masters enables 'a process of orientation and regulated access to a process of complex relationships and a move from peripheral participation to full participation' (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 36). Activities such as mentoring and networking enable novices and masters to establish relationships and exchange support throughout their socialisation processes (Mullen and Forbes, 2000; Cawyer et al., 2002). Learning in the profession enhances the movement or positioning of individuals from legitimate peripheral participation to full participation. I would suggest that this movement or positioning represents what professional socialisation is all about.

### **2.5.3 How do I use the communities of practice model in researching academic socialisation?**

COPs, as used in this study, refers not only to a group of academics in universities, but also to others outside academia whose 'mutual engagement, accountability to the enterprise and negotiability of the repertoire' (Wenger, 1998, pp. 152-153) centre on research, teaching, writing, networking and managing (Blaxter et al., 1998). These others include publishers, consultants and other practitioners who normally collaborate with academics in their work practice. The boundary of practice cuts across national and international divides. As such, it is important to note that the use of the term 'community' does not usually 'imply harmony or collaboration' (Wenger, 1998, p. 85). The



possibilities for disagreements and conflict among its members are ever present within COPs.

In general, individual academics belong to various COPs throughout their careers. According to Billett (2001) and Boud and Middleton (2003), different COPs provide different opportunities for learning. Mutual engagement in these COPs implies that individuals constantly contribute and gain various social supports from others within their social networks. As community members, individuals generate their identities through continuous engagement with the orientation shared within their various COPs. In academic socialisation, the academics learn to master the strategies, normally in the form of embedded or tacit knowledge and skills, through their exposure to the 'hidden curriculum' (Delamont et al., 2000), or 'the rules and the trade of a given practice' (Gherardi and Nicolini, 2002). The exposure to new situations and experiences transforms individuals' attitudes and identity towards the practice of their communities.

Using a COP model to explore the everyday realities of academic socialisation enables me to investigate how academics learn throughout their careers and constantly develop their identities as professionals, and to suggest that becoming an academic not only involves '...entering and coming to know a community of practice' (Tight, 2003, p. 165), but also positioning oneself appropriately within the 'unequal relations of power' (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 42) of academia.

## **2.6 Previous studies linking professional socialisation, organisational learning and communities of practice**

As there is a vast amount of research and writing which is relevant to professional socialisation, this section concentrates on a number of previous studies that link professional socialisation, organisational learning and COPs. Gherardi and Nicolini (2002) investigate how novices on a building site master the practice of safety at work. Supporting learning through participation in organisational learning, their findings suggest that mastering a practice requires more than being taught explicitly. Novices learnt to use appropriate language and the culture of the work site. Their findings also suggest that the novice site workers were not dominantly passive or simply moulded into the practice of the community. Instead, the novices' active participation with experienced colleagues enabled them to make sense of the explicit and tacit knowledge and skills, and the power relations embedded in the practice. Active participation rather than merely acquiring the content knowledge about the practice enhances their organisational/workplace learning.

Gherardi and Nicolini (2002) succinctly illustrate how learning relies on one's ability to socialise, to engage within the culture and to negotiate one's identity as a participant. Learning involves more than using one's mind to think. It requires participation in a practice, and their data, generated from an ethnographic study, appropriately address these issues. Their findings support the ideas put forth by Lave and Wenger (1991) and other scholars who constantly emphasise the importance of participation as a way of learning and knowing in an organisation.

Another study by Boud and Middleton (2003) also looks into how workers learn from their peers. Unlike Gherardi and Nicolini's (2002) focus on one single workplace, they studied multiple worksites with differentiated work cultures to understand how social relations at work contribute to learning. In studying the ways in which members of various workgroups learn, they use semi-structured interviews and observation. Boud and Middleton also analyse the extent to which the COPs (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) model adequately explains learning at work. They highlight the importance of researching informal learning and unveil the tacit or embedded knowledge practised by workers in order to improve future practice.

Boud and Middleton's (2003) findings suggest that workers learn the most through informal networks, and their learning primarily depend on the nature of the work contexts. More learning opportunities are evident within established communities as compared to new and temporary groups. The frequency and consistency of how knowledge and skills are passed on among members also influences organisational learning. They suggest that a weaker frame of knowledge transmission or a 'loosely coupled' environment might limit learning opportunities. Establishing and belonging to a strong community with sustained relationships, interest and practice increase one's opportunity to learn and socialise.

Using Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of situated learning, Fuller and Unwin (2005) study how experienced workers learn at work. They suggest that experienced workers



need to engage with ongoing learning at work in order to suit organisational expectations that keep on changing and developing. They argue that more studies should focus on the ongoing learning of experienced workers in order to facilitate their continuous development at work. Based on case studies carried out in two contrasting organisations, they discuss how older workers experience and make sense of their learning opportunities at work. Their findings stress the importance of social structure, as in organisational culture and history, organisational structure, work design and performance appraisal, in providing workplace learning opportunities, whilst simultaneously recognising workers as active agents who can decide the extent of their participation in these activities. They argue that different kinds of work organisations and work designs might create different learning environments and opportunities for workplace learning. Fuller and Unwin (2005) conclude that more empirical research on how this relationship impacts on the way different groups of employees, including experienced ones, learn at work would help workers to make sense of their continuous professional development.

In an ethnographic study of entrepreneurs, Down and Reveley (2004) use Wenger's (1998) COPs framework, to show how generational encounters between young and old managers influence the young managers' identities. They emphasise how novices and full participants within COPs interact, learn and negotiate their identities. Their findings describe how generational encounters enable younger generations to make use of the community tradition and eventually develop their own ways of doing things. Down and Reveley (2004) discuss how the interaction within the community tradition transforms the younger manager's entrepreneurial identity.

Two other studies by Fuller and Unwin (2003) and Fuller et al. (2005) analyse Lave and Wenger's concept of legitimate peripheral participation in understanding workplace learning. Like Boud and Middleton (2003), their aim is to find out the extent to which Lave and Wenger's theories sufficiently explain the process of learning at work. They suggest that workers' active participation and continuous personal development opportunities provided by institutional arrangements will enhance learning at work and effectively facilitate the socialisation process. However, whilst accepting the significant contribution offered by Lave and Wenger's (1991) COP model for future research in learning at work, Fuller et al. (2005) argue that the concept of legitimate peripheral learning should include both newcomers and experienced members' ways of learning. In other words, they suggest that the legitimate peripheral participation concept is applicable to explain how all people, not just newcomers, learn at work.

Fuller and Unwin's (2003) findings also stress the importance of formal education (training and reflective activities) in supplementing learning through participation, a view that was less emphasised by Lave and Wenger (1991). They support Hodgkinson and Hodgkinson's (2004) view of the importance of addressing issues related to the interaction between individuals' biography and the work context, and power relations within COPs, which would affect workplace learning. They conclude that the diversity of work settings plays an important part in shaping how learners learn at work. Further studies on this diversity would illuminate the everyday realities of how individuals experience their learning and professional socialisation processes.



Lave and Wenger's situated learning theory and their concept of legitimate peripheral participation have also been used to understand the learning experiences of students, trainee lecturers and academics. Using the Chicago School of Sociology's notion of career and Lave and Wenger's (1991) work on situated learning, Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000) develop the concept of 'learning career'. For them, a learning career is 'the development of dispositions to learning over time' (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000, p. 590). Based on their longitudinal study which interviewed Year 11 students, Bloomer and Hodkinson suggest that a learner's identity, which include one's commitment and perception towards learning gradually transform through his or her exposure to diverse forms of social interaction, and to new events and changing circumstances. This identity transformation which encourages the individual learner to engage in a wider range of activities, can be understood as the movements from peripheral participation to fuller engagement in COPs (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000) also highlight the influence of individual's positioning (who the person is and where in society he or she is positioned) on one's learning and actions throughout his or her life.

Trowler and Knight's (2000) case study of academic induction and socialisation analyses the processes by which new academics are inducted and socialised into their profession. Using Lave and Wenger's (1991) model of COPs and Engestrom's (1987) 'activity systems theory', they note that academic socialisation requires new academics to engage in both formal academic development and, most importantly, the informal learning activities afforded by each COP and activity system that they are in. They argue that



learning through participation in these activities enables new academics to practise and subconsciously learn and master the embedded and tacit knowledge of academic work, which are vital in facilitating their induction and socialisation as academics.

In another article derived from the same study, Knight and Trowler (2000) stress the importance of departmental leadership in nurturing a rich organisational culture to facilitate learning opportunities among academics and students. Interestingly, this idea is consistent with Fuller and Unwin's (2005) findings which also emphasise the significant contribution of a supportive organisational culture, structure and work design in providing workplace learning opportunities among employees.

In a study of a group of trainee lecturers, Bathmaker and Avis (2005) use Lave and Wenger's (1991) work on COPs to examine how cultures of learning and teaching in further education colleges influence the formation of their professional identities. The trainee teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire and a diary, and to engage in a focus group discussion. Bathmaker and Avis's (2005) findings illustrate how most of the trainees felt that, instead of moving through legitimate peripheral participation, they were marginalised and alienated from their COPs. These findings highlight the importance of access to workplace learning opportunities and a supportive organisational culture to facilitate workplace learning as well as academic socialisation.

## 2.7 Defining the gap

This section defines the gap that provides the focus for this study. According to Bourdieu (1988), academic socialisation involves the ‘investment of time’. Throughout their careers, academics participate, invest and spend a substantial period of time to learn, accumulate their ‘cultural, symbolic and social capital’ (Arthur et al., 1999, p. 158) and master their everyday work practice. Exploring the lived experiences of academics moving through different stages in their careers would illuminate this socialisation process. Nevertheless, the review of previous studies on academic socialisation shows that a substantial amount of research on academic careers has been focused on the socialisation of new entrants into the profession. Studies by Delamont et al. (2000), Knight and Trowler (2000) and Bathmaker and Avis (2005) provide insightful understanding about the academic socialisation of new entrants into academia (doctoral students, trainee lecturers and new academics, respectively). However, their foci on the initial experience say less about what happens after that. What about the socialisation of experienced academics? To date not much research appears to have been done into the experiences of academics moving through different stages in their careers. Similarly, Tight (2002, p.16) provides an interesting space for research on experienced academics when he highlights that:

No booklet entitled ‘Roles and Responsibilities of Professors’ was provided. By contrast, a great deal of, increasingly mandatory, advice and practice is provided for those taking up their first academic appointment (principally concerned with how to teach), those seeking to gain research grants, and those chairing a department or exercising senior managerial responsibilities...bibliographic searches also revealed that little appeared to have been written specifically on the theory and practice of being a professor.

For an academic position that is strongly associated with ‘some connotations of eminence, expertise, leadership, authority and reputation’ (Tight, 2002, p. 30), I strongly believed that the academic socialisation of how people have come to be professors deserves further exploration. This study is an attempt to help fill in this research gap.

On a similar note, my review of the previous studies which use COPs model also demonstrated that most of them have been primarily focused on the learning of novices, at the expense of the old-timers, despite Lave and Wenger’s (1991, p. 117) suggestion that ‘everyone’s participation is legitimately peripheral in some respect’. This suggestion implies that learning through participation within a COP involves both novices and experienced members, and yet less attention was given to analysing how experienced members engage in ongoing learning throughout their careers. How do their individual biographies influence their learning and socialisation? What can be learnt from their experiences? These questions highlight some significant theoretical gaps that warrant further exploration. These arguments strengthen the requirement to explore the lived experiences of professors moving through different stages in their academic careers.

## **2.8 Summary of the chapter**

In developing the conceptual framework of the study, I have reviewed the literature associated with academic and professional socialisation, organisational learning, COPs, the cultures of academic disciplines and the formation of academic identity. By looking at academic socialisation as a process of social interaction, I found the concept of a career as developed by the Chicago School of Sociology, and Lave and Wenger’s (1991) COPs



model, which link the individuals to their social structures, to be helpful as a framework for my further analysis. As discussed in Chapter 1, the Chicago School's notion of career which involves individual's objective career movement and identity transformation and the COPs model, enables me to analyse academic socialisation as a situated learning process that takes place throughout one's career. The sense of becoming involves more than the development of professional competence and acquisition of skills. It requires learning through participation and a constant negotiation of one's identity.

By linking career to learning, I also found Bloomer and Hodkinson's (2000) concept of learning career to be useful in this study. The concept of learning career in this study will be used to explain how academics' dispositions influence their process of learning to career or learning to become an academic. Thus, this study will look at how the learning careers of individuals develop throughout different stages in their careers. Instead of following Bloomer and Hodkinson's (2000) narrow focus on individual's disposition towards formal education, my approach in this study would consider its relation to both formal and informal learning experiences.

Appropriate methodology is needed to explore the academic socialisation process in relation to the concept of COPs. Although most of the studies on COPs discussed earlier have chosen ethnography as the method of inquiry, I will approach this area from a different perspective. As the objective of this study is to explore the career experiences of professors moving through different stages in their careers, a longitudinal ethnography would not be feasible for a three-year doctoral research programme. Instead of using

ethnography, I have decided to research professors' career experiences using a methodology informed by the biographical research approach. The following chapter will explain further how this approach facilitates my research on how professors experienced academic socialisation, and how their identities as academics were constantly transformed throughout their careers.

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## CHAPTER 3

### Research Methodology

#### 3.0 Introduction

The primary aim of this study is to provide some understanding of academic socialisation through an exploration of the career experiences of professors at a UK university. In order to gain this understanding, I gathered data from in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews with 12 professors from 12 academic departments, asking about their perceptions and experiences moving through different stages in their academic careers. The interviews are aimed at depicting the professors' lived experiences in developing their academic careers. Collecting data directly from the professors themselves provides an understanding 'into the experiences of academics at different stages in their careers' (Tight, 2003, p. 166). Besides the interviews, data were also collected and supplemented using documentary analysis.

These two data-gathering techniques were employed to explore the career experiences of each professor. By exploring the career experiences of 12 professors from various departments in a university, my primary aim is to demystify the social processes encapsulated in one's 'academic career journey'. My suggestion is that an overview perspective on academic socialisation might be uncovered by exploring the career of those who have moved through different stages in their careers. Other approaches could have been undertaken, but a biographical approach to researching professors' lived experiences was undertaken so as to depict the evolving sequence of how individual academics learn



and grow in their careers. Such a focus seemed to require a qualitative approach, in which their career experiences would be uncovered through in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviewing. Besides the interviews, data were also collected and supplemented using documentary analysis. These two collecting techniques enabled me to demystify the social processes encapsulated in the ‘academic career journey’.

This chapter outlines the methodology adopted in this research. The appropriate choice of methodology enabled me to answer the research questions uncovered in Chapters 1 and 2. This chapter is organised in ten sections. Following this introductory section, section 3.1 discusses the use of qualitative research methodology that underpins the study. Section 3.2 describes the use of biographical method and in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviewing to explore the professors’ career experiences. Section 3.3 justifies how I adopted appropriate research methods to explore academics’ perceptions of the ways and how they have come to be professors. This section will also consider the way in which my own life history is intimately connected with this study. Sections 3.4 and 3.5 explain the study’s fieldwork. Section 3.4 describes how the informants were identified and how I negotiated access to the research site. Section 3.5 outlines relevant steps and procedures that were used to collect data. It also focuses on the research instrument and how I addressed the ethical issues raised. Section 3.6 describes how I analysed and interpreted the data. Section 3.7 explains how I established the trustworthiness of the study. Section 3.8 describes how I avoided researcher bias. Section 3.9 presents my personal reflections on the features of the methodology used and highlights the problems encountered in the study.

Finally, section 3.10 summarises the research contributions and provides some concluding remarks.

### **3.1 The research methodology of the study: Why qualitative research?**

This section discusses the research methodology that underpins the study. In choosing the methodology for any study, I suggest that no single research methodology is superior than any other. A research methodology should be applied appropriately and suits the research questions of a study.

A qualitative research approach was chosen as the methodology because it provides ways of appropriately answering the research questions of my study. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the research questions of this study require me to probe the professors' perspectives on how they have come to be professors; on what is it like to become a professor; on how their academic identities are shaped; and to elicit their perceptions towards continuing professional development in academia. These research questions require the professors to construct and provide meanings based on their self-perceptions. A qualitative research methodology seems suitable for this study because its focus demands exploratory and in-depth interviewing so as to uncover the professors' knowledge and perceptions on their career experiences.

Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. (Creswell, 1998, p. 15)



This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials - case study; personal experience; introspection; life story; interview; artefacts; cultural texts and productions; observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts – that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individual's lives. (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, pp. 3-4)

These two quotations, from leading qualitative research scholars are closely related to my reason for selecting qualitative research as the methodology of the study. My research questions are aimed at exploring the 'real-life, complex and holistic' (Mason, 1996) process of academic socialisation that evolves in a 'natural setting' (Creswell, 1998; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, 2005). The academic socialisation process is explored through examining the professors' observable 'objective' career progression and their 'subjective' career experiences.

As discussed in Chapter 2 (The Literature Review), I use Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of communities of practice (COPs) to answer these research questions and to explore the ways in which the academics experienced their academic socialisation process. The COPs framework, which is based on a social theory of learning, promotes an understanding of individual experience within a wider social and historical context of activity and development (Wenger, 1998). The focus on individual career experience thus informed my methodological approach in this study. According to Creswell (1998), qualitative research methodology enables a researcher to present a detailed view of an experience and to bring her or himself into the study as an 'active learner' who can tell stories from the informants' views as part of achieving 'reflexivity' in research. In short,



the qualitative methodology fits the research question of my study and the literature reviewed because the primary aim is to draw out subjective career experiences of the professors undergoing the process of academic socialisation.

Nygren and Blom (2002) maintain that researchers can be creative and yet aware of how methodological choices are connected to the basic philosophical assumptions of their study. This is because the researcher needs to be accountable for the kind of knowledge that has been produced. Having a clear understanding of the ontological, epistemological and methodological aspects of my research places me in a stronger position to justify the usefulness of the results of my study. After reviewing the research questions, the previous literature and engaging in an intellectual discussion with my supervisor, I decided to adopt a methodology informed by an interpretive biographical approach.

### **3.2 The use of biographical research approach in the study**

This section describes the use of biographical research approach in this study. Biographical research studies individuals by situating them in a real life context, using their stories and life events as a database, and suggests the presence of the 'reflexive' researcher throughout the study. This approach accords with the objectives of my research. I chose biographical research approach to researching professors' career experiences in order to depict the evolving sequence of how academics learn and grow in their careers.

Denzin suggests that the biographical method enables a researcher to highlight the key events involved in an individual's subjective experience:

Biographical method is the studied use and collection of life documents that describe turning point moments in an individual's life. (Denzin, 1989a, p. 69)

Biographical method presents the experience and definitions held by one person, one group, or one organisation as this person, group, or organisation interprets those experiences. The materials include any record or document, including the case histories of social agencies, that throws light on the subjective behaviour of individuals or groups. (Denzin, 1989b, p. 183)

Informed by the biographical method and employing an in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviewing research approach enables me to highlight how individual academics negotiate their identities throughout their careers:

A biographical or life history research acknowledges that there is a significant link between individuals' experiences and historical and social events, in which individuals 'negotiate their identities and make sense of the rules and roles of the social worlds in which they live.' (Goodson and Sikes, 2001, p. 3)

In researching academic socialisation, I adopt an in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviewing approach in my study for its '...potential to illuminate the detail of experience, conveying what it is like to be there' (Tight, 2003, p. 200). Collecting data directly from the professors themselves provides an understanding into their experiences moving through different stages in their careers. The in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviewing research approach enables me to explore and to build up a history of the professors' academic lives. It helps me to ask the informants questions like 'why', 'how', 'what is it like' and 'what does it mean to you' (Goodson and Sikes, 2001). According to

Tight (2003), biographical method is commonly used in researching academic work. Others such as Valkeavaara (1999) and Robinson (2003) have applied biographical approach to examine the construction of identity through the experiences of human resource developers and pupil teachers respectively.

Denzin (1989a) suggests some procedural steps in gathering and interpreting a biography. The two steps are (1) the objective format and (2) the subjective, interpretive format (Denzin, 1989a). I would like to describe these steps in relation to my research project:

- **Objective Format**

1. I began with an 'objective' set of experiences of the professors' academic lives through documenting their academic career histories. This information, which includes the professors' academic background, employment, promotion, professional activities and family information, were put in each individual folder. Most of the information was documented based on the professors' curriculum vitae and their personal websites. I later used the information in this folder to facilitate my in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviewing interviews.
2. Next, I gathered the professors' narrative accounts and other contextual biographical materials using in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviewing to complement my earlier documentary analysis. The informants were asked to describe their career experiences in the form of a story or narrative. This is when



my data collection moved towards building up the professors' career stories in the form of 'narrative as chronicle' (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996).

- **Subjective Format**

3. Subsequently, these stories were organised around themes or signposts (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996) that indicate key events or 'epiphanies' (Denzin, 1989a) in the professors' academic lives. They were asked to recall the significant events that occurred at different stages in their careers. According to Denzin (1997, p. 58) 'Epiphanies are interactional moments and experiences that leave marks on people's lives...and alter the fundamental meaning structures in a person's life'. Following Sartre's (1963) progressive-regressive method, also employed by Denzin (1987) in his study of American alcoholics, I worked forward and backward through the key events narrated by the professors to draw an interpretive circle around their academic lives.
4. I explored the meaning of these stories by asking the individual professors to provide explanations for their decisions and actions. According to Denzin (1989a, p. 56), biographical research involves generating a 'set of experiences in the subject's life'. Using their autobiographical accounts, I constructed the professors' biographies and highlighted the key events and key social actors that have shaped their lived experiences.

5. I also linked the professors' explanations to the larger social structures such as their social interactions in their COPs, the cultural issues and ideologies in their respective academic disciplines and historical context, so as to further explore the meaning of their stories. This cross interpretation enabled me to relate their career stories to the relevant literature and explain how their experiences can be theorised as lessons to be learnt or as a contribution to knowledge.

In short, the in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviewing informed by the biographical approach was able to add depth and richness to my study on academic socialisation. Although its focus, which normally involves only a small number of individuals, may lack generalisability and thus be questioned by a more quantitative and positivistic research point of view, in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviewing research has the potential to explore and illuminate in detail the career experiences of my informants. It was feasible for a three-year doctoral research project that aimed at providing in-depth and useful research findings on academic socialisation.

Its credibility lies in how the findings can provide readers with 'user generalisability' (Merriam, 1991) or some understanding about academic socialisation which they may later apply and adapt to their own situations and contexts.

### 3.3 Justification for the choice of research method

This section justifies how I chose appropriate research methods to explore academics' perceptions of the ways and how they have come to be professors. This section will also consider the way in which my own in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviewing is linked to this work.

One of the challenges in researching lived experiences is to find ways of capturing what is often subjective, tacit and embedded within an individual's everyday work activities. Such a focus seems to require an exploratory, probing and qualitative approach in which career experiences can be uncovered through in-depth qualitative interviewing and documentary analysis. These methods enabled me to demystify the social processes encapsulated in the academic career journey. The research methods were designed to:

- collect background information (institutions, length of study and service, and qualifications) about informants' characteristics, derived from the professors' academic and career history
- explore their experiences of academic socialisation and learning at work

To do so, the study was directed at professors with long experience. This decision was made because a long professional experience in moving through different stages in one's career enables an individual to explain and evaluate his or her career experience. References to the professors' career experiences were used to illustrate emerging themes. The evidence is analysed in terms of five broad and overlapping themes, namely 'moving



into academia', 'gaining recognition in academia', 'learning throughout one's career', 'challenges faced in developing one's career and coping strategies' and 'the construction of academic identity'.

### 3.3.1 Why choose interviewing?

This research project relies on interviewing to explore professors' career experiences. Asking people to talk about their lives can generate massive data (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995). Interviewing enabled me to collect the professors' accounts of how they enacted and developed their career. These accounts include events and the processes involved at different stages in their careers. I conducted a series of 36 in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviewing interviews with 12 professors in 12 academic departments at the University of Warwick. The interviews sought to identify detailed experience of their academic socialisation process.

I believe interviewing enables me to describe and understand the lived world of individuals and how they give meaning to their experience. Interviewing was the most appropriate method to use in this study, as it provided detailed and personal information, all of which could be used for the analysis to inform the results of the study. Seeking a more detailed, personal and in-depth account of the professors' lived experiences justifies my preference for using interviewing instead of questionnaires in the study.

Through interviewing, I managed to probe and draw out the specific and rich details about the professors' experiences in developing their careers. Interviewing enabled me to position

myself as a researcher and a learner who prepares to gain unexpected and serendipitous information from the professors. As an interviewer, I was able to remain non-directive in the sense that I did not impose the structures on my informants unlike providing questionnaires to be filled in. The interpersonal interaction gave me the opportunity to further probe on interesting issues, which might not have been possible had I used other research methods.

However, I acknowledge that one of the challenges faced in conducting a in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviewing research interview is the need to consider the power relations between the research informants and the researcher. The challenges also include setting up a 'common ground' (Goodson and Sikes, 2001) and considering how to present myself in the interviews, the types of clothes to wear, and the language to use with the professors. Being an academic myself provided an advantage in setting up this common ground. Dressing casually and relating my own experience as an academic to their stories in the interviews helped me to establish good rapport with the professors. I felt that they treated me as one of their colleagues through their openness in sharing their experiences.

Interestingly, relying solely on interviewing also invited potential challenges. Sikes (2000) highlights the possibility of qualitative researchers, particularly those who employ a narrative-based approach, discovering that their informants had told them lies in the middle or at a later stage of their studies. To validate the professors' narrations, I sought some alternative data collection solutions, using documentary analysis and participant observation to substantiate my findings. Sikes (2000, p. 267) further recommends that 'an

approach which looks for themes across a number of interviews, respondent (informant) validation, researcher reflexivity, and triangulation of various kinds may provide methodological substance and support for the researchers' accounts in their research report'. The following section justifies why I decided to use documentary analysis and participant observation to support my interview data.

### **3.3.2 Why documentary analysis?**

In addition to the interviews, I also conducted some documentary analysis on materials related to my research informants. Documentary analysis involved looking at the professors' curriculum vitae, their lists of publications, and their scholarly activities on their personal websites and other forms of media. I also referred to my researcher's field notes and research diary. These documents helped me to understand more about my informants' career stories. Besides using the documents to supplement and support the interview findings, they were also used to validate issues or events covered in the interviews. This helped me to carry out data triangulation. I collected some documents about my informants from them personally. Some documents such as publications and curriculum vitae were accessed through the Internet.

In short, my research methods of combining interviews and documentary analysis explored the views of the professors with regard to their experiences of academic socialisation, career choice, educational and training experiences, progression and development. In this thesis, cross-validation of primary and secondary sources was carried out to confirm events and other details included in the professors' career stories. The main aim was to carry out



triangulation and achieve trustworthiness and dependability (Patton, 2002). I sought perceptions and views about activities that were personal to the individual professor rather than the simple recalling of facts and events. The combination of the interviews and documentary analysis helped me to sustain the collaborative nature of the research project. Informants became more open to share with me their lived experiences. I managed to establish my constructivist voice of being a 'passionate participant' (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 115), who actively engaged in reconstructing the findings with my informants and strengthened my understanding of academic socialisation.

### **3.4 Entering the field**

This section explains the study's fieldwork. Through the fieldwork carried out for this study, my intention was to find out the experiences and perceptions of the professors in connection to their academic socialisation and professional development. This section also describes how the informants were identified and how I negotiated access to the research site.

#### **3.4.1 The autobiography of the researcher**

As mentioned in the first chapter, I have developed a strong interest in understanding the theory and practice of becoming an academic ever since I was very young. I became a secondary school teacher and did my Master of Science in Extension and Continuing Education, through part-time study. Doing a postgraduate degree enabled me to do the thing that I liked the most as a university student, that is, research. In 2000, I joined the

university as a lecturer and this gave me more space to expand my interest in understanding academic careers. In 2002, I was granted a scholarship to do a doctoral degree. I decided to explore academic careers further and chose to come to the UK to work with my supervisor, whose expertise covers both fields: higher education and continuing education. I decided to study the career experiences of professors. Thus, the drive to complete this research project is inspired by my professional and personal commitments to understand the subject of the study and to facilitate my own academic development.

### **3.4.2 Why the University of Warwick?**

My initial plan was to research the career experiences of professors at my university in Malaysia. However, I soon realised that in order to learn something new, I should move beyond my own 'backyard'. Researching in another institution gave me some distance and something different for me to explore. As an academic in Malaysia, I was quite knowledgeable about academic socialisation in Malaysia. The disadvantage of researching a different context like the United Kingdom (UK) is that I knew much less about its academic environment. However, this opportunity also became an advantage because I believed that learning from the UK context would bring new and insightful inputs to my fellow colleagues in Malaysia.

Thus, I chose to do my fieldwork at the University of Warwick. The University has some significant characteristics that offered insightful findings for the research project. The characteristics are as follows:

- It is ranked highly among UK universities, based on the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE).
- Its location, which is within reasonable travelling distance, gave me access to meet and to interview my informants (as a postgraduate student and a researcher). The academic departments were geographically close to each other. The closeness of each research site to my office at Warwick Institute of Education and my house in Coventry enabled me to carry out a series of in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviewing interviews with all 12 professors in the mornings, afternoons and evenings. The reasonable travelling distance indeed played an important role in enhancing my fieldwork from February 2003 to February 2004.

### **3.4.3 Identification of the informants and negotiating research access**

My initial concern was getting and maintaining access to the professors at Warwick. The professors were identified using the purposive sampling technique. 'Purposive sampling is based on the assumption that the researcher wants to discover, to understand and to gain insights from the sample so that he or she can learn as much as possible' (Goodson and Sikes, 2001, p. 24). I obtained the information about the professors through the University website. My selection was based on their contribution to their respective discipline, the university and the public. This is reflected in their activities and publications, which I gathered from the websites and documents in the library.



Next, I prepared a list of professors to be invited to participate in my research project. I had selected a professor from each department so as to represent various disciplines. I contacted them through e-mail expressing my interest in studying their career experiences. Twenty-one professors from various academic departments were contacted and 12 subsequently agreed to voluntarily participate in this study. We set up a meeting to discuss and to negotiate research access. In the first meeting, I explained the nature of my research project. I understood that my potential research informants would be particularly concerned about my research competence and ethical responsibility. I prepared a brief research proposal including the research questions and the interview schedules so that my prospective informants were clear about my intention to collaborate with them. Christians (2000, p. 139) recommended that a qualitative researcher should consider the code of ethics that covers informed consent, deception, privacy, confidentiality, and accuracy:

First, informed consent insists that research informants have the right to be informed about the nature and consequences of the research in which they are involved.... Informants must agree to voluntarily participate, without any coercion from the researcher.... Second, the codes of ethics oppose deception on the part of the researcher.... Third, codes and ethics insist on protecting people's identities and those of the research locations (confidentiality). Data can be made public whilst simultaneously protected by anonymity.

#### **3.4.4 The research participants/informants**

The informants for this study were 12 professors from 12 different academic departments at the University of Warwick. They were selected from within the Faculty of Arts, Medicine, Sciences, and Social Studies. The age of the professors ranged from late 30s to early 60s, the average age being in the early 50s. They all had more than 10 years of work experience in academia. The professors' identities were hidden under a fictitious name, using the name

of their faculties as their surname to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of the informants. Table 1 provides the details of the professors who participated in the study:

**Table 1: Research informants, by faculty and gender**

Name	Faculty	Gender
Professor James Arts	Arts	Male
Professor Ronald Arts	Arts	Male
Professor Matt Arts	Arts	Male
Professor Charles Arts	Arts	Male
Professor John Medicine	Medicine	Male
Professor Mark Science	Science	Male
Professor Peter Science	Science	Male
Professor Richard Science	Science	Male
Professor Mary Social	Social Studies	Female
Professor Katherine Social	Social Studies	Female
Professor Alan Social	Social Studies	Male
Professor Derek Social	Social Studies	Male

Most of the professors were cautious and careful but they were helpful and cooperative with my intention to study their career experiences. I laid emphasis on maintaining the anonymity of their academic departments and their real identities, and the confidentiality of the research data. The research informants and their colleagues mentioned by the professors during the interviews were all given fictitious names.

Through exploring the career experiences of the professors, I eventually realised how easy it was to identify the individuals through their accounts about the universities where they

graduated from, their areas of specialisation, their research interests, their research and consultancy projects and the professional associations in which they are actively involved. These details were also concealed in the thesis through giving fictitious names to the institutions and providing a general rather than a specific description about each professor's career information. Examples were in the use of the words 'arts' and 'science' in describing the professors' area of specialisation. The careful editing was done purposely to maintain anonymity and confidentiality, and to address the ethical issues entwined within the research project. In the event, all the 12 professors granted me access to interview and discuss with them their career experiences.

### **3.5 In the field: Data collection procedures**

This section outlines relevant steps and procedures that were used to collect data. It also describes my pilot and major studies. A discussion on the research instruments and how I addressed the ethical issues are also included.

#### **3.5.1 The pilot and major studies**

While working on my research proposal, I had the opportunity to carry out a pilot study, from January to February 2003. The pilot study was conducted with two professors at Warwick Institute of Education. The purpose of the pilot study was to provide me with some early indications on the feasibility of the research project. It also enabled me to gain some experience on how to conduct in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviewing interviews and to negotiate research access with my research informants. The pilot study



helped me to try out my interview schedule and improve my interviewing skills. I agreed with Seidman (1991, p. 29) who suggests that:

The best advice I ever received as a researcher was to do a pilot of my proposed study...Although it may not seem ahead of time that the world of interviewing research takes one along strange paths or through dangerous places, the unanticipated twists and turns of the interviewing process and complexities of the interviewing relationship deserve exploration before researchers plunge headlong into the thick of their projects.

After completing the pilot study, I had the chance to discuss the findings and analysis with my supervisor. Transcribing and analysing the pilot study interviews enabled me to gain some experience on how to manage and interpret my data. Taken as a whole, the pilot study experience helped me to refine my strategies of inquiry before moving into the major study phase.

Data collection for the major study was carried out from May 2003 to February 2004. A collective case study design was used to gain knowledge on the professors' career experiences. In collective case study, the interest is more on the effects of jointly studied cases than it is on one particular case. I acknowledged that each individual case has its own voice. Stake (1994) maintains that studying cases together can lead to a better understanding or theorising about a larger collection of cases. A collective case study design is appropriate for this study because it facilitates insight into a better understanding of the academic career based on the lived experience of the professors. This design echoes Bertaux's (1981, p. 187) recommendation that 'several life stories taken from the same set of socio-structural relations support each other and make up a strong body of evidence'.

### 3.5.2 Semi-structured interviews

As the purpose of the study was to understand academic socialisation via exploring professors' career experiences, a semi-structured interview format was used to help reduce interviewer bias and keep the interview focused. Semi-structured interviews were carried out to prompt the interviewees into recalling their own experiences as to how they experienced their academic socialisation process, and their views on learning at work throughout their careers. The ordering and duration of the questions varied according to the issues that emerged. I always referred to my interview schedule and the list of questions that I wished to cover over the course of each interview.

The reason for choosing a semi-structured interview format is because I had to be flexible, rather than follow a structured interview, because some informants may provide answers to more than one question simultaneously. A semi-structured approach helped me to guide the flow of the conversation to cover significant issues of the enquiry. This helped a lot in data analysis, especially in comparing the informants' responses to the same question.

After explaining that the interviews were anonymous and confidential, and part of my doctoral research work, I obtained their permission to tape our conversations. Each of the one-on-one interviews was tape-recorded with the participants' informed and voluntary consent. The professors were asked about their career histories, their experiences of academic socialisation, learning at work and the extent to which COPs play a part in shaping their identities as academics. I organised the professors' career stories into a 'narrative chronicle' (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). The general plot for the potential stories

was developed based on the semi-structured interview schedule. However, I encouraged the interviewees to select significant and meaningful events, people and settings that they wanted to talk about. The interviewees were not directly asked to tell stories, but they were encouraged to elaborate on their experiences and to give examples for the significant events shared during the interviews.

On some occasions, the informants agreed to be interviewed during the first meeting. I took this opportunity to build up rapport with the informants. This opportunity was also used to practise my interviewing skills. I asked for feedback from the interviewee on how the interview worked. This is in line with Robson's (2002, pp. 290-291) recommendation that:

Feedback information is not only helpful for training purposes, but also helps in the general task of viewing the interview situation as a complex social interaction whose characteristics have to some extent to be captured by the analysis.

I also used some probing techniques by asking the professors to elaborate further on the response to a question. This elaboration is valuable and may enrich the data collected. The styles of probing included conversational, elaboration and clarification (Robson, 2002). The interviews took place in the professors' personal office. Table 2 (see page 78-79) provides the dates of the interviews and observations conducted for my pilot and major studies:



**Table 2: Dates of the interviews and observations conducted for pilot and major studies.**

Date	Research Informant	Data Collection
12 February 2003	Derek Social	Interview
18 March 2003	Derek Social	Interview
1 May 2003	Alan Social	Interview
2 May 2003	Ronald Arts	Research Access
6 May 2003	Ronald Arts	Interview
7 May 2003	Katherine Social	Interview
8 May 2003	Mary Social	Research Access
13 May 2003	Alan Social	Participant Observation
13 May 2003	Katherine Social	Interview
14 May 2003	Richard Science	Research Access
15 May 2003	Mary Social	Interview
15 May 2003	Peter Science	Research Access
19 May 2003	Peter Science	Interview
20 May 2003	Alan Social	Participant Observation
23 May 2003	Mark Science	Interview
27 May 2003	Alan Social	Interview
5 June 2003	James Arts	Interview
17 June 2003	Matt Arts	Interview
1 July 2003	John Medicine	Research Access
1 October 2003	Mark Science	Interview
2 October 2003	Alan Social	Interview
3 October 2003	Richard Science	Interview

**Table 2: Dates of the interviews and observations conducted for pilot and major studies (Continued)**

Date	Research Informant	Data Collection
8 October 2003	Charles Arts	Research Access
8 October 2003	Richard Science	Interview
13 October 2003	Derek Social	Interview
16 October 2003	John Medicine	Interview
16 October 2003	Charles Arts	Interview
21 October 2003	Alan Social	Interview
23 October 2003	Charles Arts	Interview
7 November 2003	Alan Social	Interview
12 November 2003	Peter Science	Interview
14 November 2003	Matt Arts	Interview
17 November 2003	Matt Arts	Interview
18 November 2003	Mark Science	Interview
27 November 2003	Katherine Social	Interview
28 November 2003	Richard Science	Interview
9 December 2003	Mary Social	Interview
6 January 2004	Katherine Social	Interview
15 January 2004	Katherine Social	Interview
16 January 2004	John Medicine	Interview
20 January 2004	Ronald Arts	Interview
27 January 2004	Mary Social	Interview
4 February 2004	James Arts	Interview
19 February 2004	Charles Arts	Interview

Each professor was interviewed between 2 to 5 times throughout the study. The interviews, which lasted from 35 minutes to two hours, were audiotaped and detailed notes were taken from the recordings. Most of the professors were all happy to give me around an hour's interview. Two of them gave me 2 hours. Observed characteristics, such as informant's gestures, facial expressions and environmental context, were recorded in memo notes written at the close of the interview.

I was younger than all my informants. I dressed casually to create a relaxed environment and to make them feel at ease talking about their career experiences. With two cups of coffee or tea on the table, the interviews were conversational and casual. Some professors requested some coffee breaks in between the interviews and took me to a café, located at Warwick Arts Centre. I was so happy that they allowed me to jot down our conversations in my field notes while having our coffee together. This personal gesture developed a closer relationship between us and I could see that gradually, the professors began to open up and became more expressive in their stories. As the research project progressed, most of the professors were enthusiastic and relaxed in talking to me, perhaps because of our lengthy, trustful relationship. The fact that I am also an academic myself seemed to give me credibility. I found that I was treated in a professional and friendly manner in all cases.

### **3.5.3 The interview schedule**

I initially constructed the interview schedule questions (see page 82-83) based on my review of the relevant literature, which included books, journals, and other related materials. The interview schedule was used to assist me in obtaining relevant information



from the professors. The interview schedule contained questions on the professors' academic and career histories, significant events, experiences and related factors that they believe are related to their academic socialisation. As suggested by Robson (2002), my interview schedule was organised into several sections starting with an introductory comment, list of topic headings and their key questions, a set of associated prompts and ending with a closing comment.

#### **3.5.4 Digital and tape recorders**

As mentioned in the earlier section, interviews were recorded using a SONY digital recorder and SONY cassette recorder. The digital recorder features Digital Voice Editor software, which enables it to be used as a transcribing machine. All the interviews were uploaded to the SONY Digital Voice Editor software. The software enabled me to play the conversation back and forth, and this helped me in transcribing and analysing the data. In addition, the information in the recorded interviews could always be revisited for follow-up interviews. Recording benefits the informants because they are assured that the data from their narrations are treated responsibly (Seidman, 1991). Recording enables them to always have access to the data. It also means that systematic data interpretation can be made based on the recorded interview. The interpretation does not rely solely on the interviewer's field notes.

Table 3: The Interview Schedule

- 1) Opening Remarks/Icebreaking/Creating good rapport
  - a. Thank the professor for his or her willingness to share information with me
  - b. Describe the nature of the study and the purpose of the interview
  - c. Declare the confidentiality and anonymity of the informant
  - d. Get the professor’s approval to record the interview
- 2) (Research Question) What is the history of how people have come to be professors?
  - a. Would you share with me your academic and career history?
  - b. What inspired you to become an academic?
  - c. What are some of the significant events that have contributed to your career development/academic socialisation?
  - d. To what extent have these significant events contributed to your work practice?
- 3) (Research Question) How does academic identity get constructed? To what extent is academic identity formed as an individual project, to what extent do the individual academics play the roles that are strongly determined by their communities and institutions, and to what extent is academic identity a combination of both?
  - a. How do you develop/manage your career?
  - b. How do you get invited into the academic communities (recognition)?
  - c. Academic: Sculpture, sculptor or a mix of both?
  - d. Academic identity: The structure versus agency debate
- 4) (Research Question) How does learning at work impact on the academic’s identity and reputation?
  - a. How do you learn at work?
  - b. To what extent does formal learning activities contribute to your academic and identity development?
  - c. To what extent does informal learning/ everyday work practice contribute to your academic and identity development?
  - d. What are some of the challenges that you have faced in developing your career?
  - e. Why do you see them as challenging?
  - f. How do you cope and move ahead with your career?
  - g. What are the competencies that you perceived to be important in your academic/career development?

Teaching/ Writing/ Research/ Managing/ Networking
  - h. Why do you perceive these competencies as important in your academic/ career development?

Teaching/ Writing/ Research/ Managing/ Networking



**Table 3: The Interview Schedule (Continued)**

- 5) (Research Question) How do communities of practice in academia contribute to the construction of an academic’s identity?
- a. How do you view the link between your interaction with people to your academic/career development?

- Mentoring

- Coaching

- Networking

- Research Groups

b. How have these interactions affected your academic/career development?

c. What is your opinion on understanding the organisational culture and its relation to your academic/career development?
- 6) (Sub-Research Question) What is it like to become a professor?
- 7) (Sub-Research Question) What does it mean to become an academic and/or a professor?
- a. What do you want to achieve?

b. What are the roles and responsibilities of a professor?

c. What are the scholarly qualities of a professor?

d. How would you describe your career development/ career trajectory by using a metaphor as the big picture?

e. Guided participation? Planning? A matter of being lucky?
- 8) (Research Question) Based on your career experiences, what are your perceptions towards the implementation of continuing professional development in academia?
- a. What would you advise other academics on how to develop their careers?

b. What kinds of continuing professional development will ensure continuity of an individual’s existing expertise? (Maintenance of competence)

c. What kinds of activities should be undertaken to increase an individual’s current repertoire of knowledge and expertise? (Extension of competence)

d. Which elements in an individual’s present repertoire of skills need to be improved in quality? (Enhancement of competence)

e. What additional expertise should individuals be acquiring alongside their current repertoire? (Anticipation of future competence)

f. What performances should individuals cease to do to improve their effectiveness? (Removal of negative features/substitution of more appropriate behaviours)

d. Academic life: A strong versus a weak environment? What about guidelines?
- 9) Finally, is there anything about academic socialisation, academic/career development as a whole that you would like to add before we end our conversation?

With your permission, may I come again in the future? Thank you very much for your help.

Would you like a copy of the interview transcript? Mention data verification.



In order to verify my interpretation of their career experiences, I transcribed all the interviews, constructed the career stories and shared them with the professors in November 2004. Some professors agreed with my interpretation of their career chronicles. However, there were also those who provided their comments and feedback through face-to-face meeting and e-mail, so as to modify my initial interpretation of their career chronicles.

### **3.5.5 Internet-linked personal computer**

The Internet-linked personal computer has been the major site for communication between the informants and myself. The appointments and documents related to the study were accessed through the Internet. Even though some of the appointments were discussed on the telephone, I noticed that e-mails and attachments were more regularly exchanged between the informants and myself. This means of communication really helped to expedite the progress of the research.

### **3.5.6 Addressing the ethical issues in the study**

According to Bar On (1996, p. 9), interviewing in biographical research is like an informal intervention, 'without the clear boundaries' that implies a more formal research relationship. I managed to create distance from the informants to avoid being too emotionally involved. However, I also tried to be close enough to the informants so that I could empathise with their autobiographical accounts. Putting myself in these two different yet overlapping positions created some tensions.

In addressing the ethical issues in the study, I made it a point of not revealing the true identity of the informants. This anonymity is important to maintain the confidentiality of the informants and to safeguard them from any unwanted repercussions after the findings are revealed. Informed consent was obtained from the informants before any interview and observation was carried out.

Interviews have an ethical dimension: they concern interpersonal interaction and produce information about the human condition. 'One can identify three main areas of ethical issues here, that is, informed consent, confidentiality and the consequences of the interviews' (Kvale, 1996, pp. 111-120). In carrying out the study, I referred to Cohen et al. (2001, p. 292) who raise some ethical questions to which answers needed to be given before the interviews commenced. Table 4 (see page 86-87) outlines these questions and how I addressed the ethical issues in the study.

**Table 4: Ethical questions and how they are addressed in this study**

Number	Ethical Question	How the question is/are addressed
1	Has the informed consent of the interviewees been obtained?	Informed consent was obtained in the first meeting.
2	Has this been obtained in writing or orally?	Obtained orally and via e-mail from the professors.
3	How much information should be given in advance of the study?	Presented a written research proposal, which includes the research questions, methodology and interview schedule in advance.
4	How can adequate information be provided if the study is exploratory?	My main aim is to explore their career experiences via their answers to the research questions. Thus the focus is on the process rather than on the individuals.
5	Have the possible consequences of the research been made clear to the participants?	I explained the use of the data for my PhD research and future work to my informants and they agreed as long as their identities remain confidential.
6	Has care been taken to prevent any harmful effects of the research to the participants?	Anonymity should prevent harmful effects to the participants.
7	To what extent do any potential benefits outweigh the potential harm done by the research, and how justifiable is this for conducting the research? How will the research benefit the participants? Who will benefit from the research? To what extent is there reciprocity between what participants give to and receive from the research?	The research provides valuable and empirical information for the benefit of other academics. It provides some reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action opportunities for the participants (professors) to proceed with their successful careers. This answers the reciprocity aspect. The narratives guide other staff to develop their career paths.
8	Have confidentiality and anonymity been guaranteed? Should participants' identities be disguised?	I have made full effort to secure this throughout my writings based on this research project.
9	How does the Data Protection Act (1984) operate in interview situations?	Data collected in the interviews will only be used for the purpose of the PhD dissertation and future academic articles. I will not manipulate informants' information to be used for other non-academic purposes.



Number	Ethical Question	How the question is/are addressed
10	Who will have access to the data?	The researcher and his supervisor have access to the raw data. However, a wider audience including the examiners and other readers can access the 'reduced' data.
11	What has been done to ensure that the interviews are conducted in an appropriate, non-stressful, non-threatening manner?	The interviews are conducted in the informants' room, and they may choose whether to answer or to avoid questions in the interviews.
12	How will the data and transcriptions be verified, and by whom?	The informants themselves will verify the transcription of data.
13	Who will see the results of the research? Will some part be withheld? Who owns the data? At what stage does ownership of the data pass from interviewees to the interviewer? Are there rights of veto for what appears? To whom should sensitive data be made available?	The results of the research will be passed to the PhD supervisor and examiners. The ownership of the data belongs to the researcher, but I will strictly adhere to such aspects as confidentiality and the anonymity of the informants. The ownership of the interview transcripts belongs to both the informants and the researcher. Sensitive data are available only to the informants, the researcher and his supervisor.
14	How far should the researcher's agenda and views predominate? What if the researcher makes a different interpretation from the interviewee? Should the interviewees be told, even if they have not asked for these interpretations?	The interpretation will be jointly constructed between the informants and the researcher. However, the researcher, to the best of his ability, will interpret and prepare the final report whilst considering the theoretical and practical aspects that underpin the study.

### **3.6 Data analysis and interpretation**

This section describes how I analysed and interpreted the data. The data analysis was based on various sources, including interviews, documentary analysis, and a literature review. Data analysis of interviews was carried out simultaneously with the data collection phase. The data analysis progressed through a number of different stages.

#### **3.6.1 Managing the data**

This section discusses and explains my approach to managing and analysing the data. To work with qualitative data means to work with massive data. An initial effort should be made towards making the data accessible and manageable. I created file folders for each professor. This involved keeping documents such as curriculum vitae, publications, newspaper articles, e-mail messages and their contact details. Besides the documents, I labelled each tape and interview transcript. This is very important for data retrieval. I gave each professor a codename and each interview was labelled with the date and time it was conducted. Systematic data management facilitates data verification for follow-up interviews.

#### **3.6.2 Transcribing the interview verbatim**

Interviews were transcribed verbatim, including pauses, laughs and other remarks. Transcribing required a lot of patience and close listening. I spent a lot of time on transcribing: an hour-length interview took approximately three hours. However, spending more time on this exercise facilitated my analysis because I gradually began to see recurring themes in my interview transcripts. Goodson and Sikes (2001) suggest that

repetitive listening and transcribing, and being closely engaged with the data enable a researcher to develop themes for further analysis.

### **3.6.3 Analysing the interviews**

The analysis started as soon as transcribing was completed. This section discusses and explains my approach to analysing my interview data. In order to achieve quality data analysis, I developed a framework that was derived from various approaches namely, Labov's (1972, 1982) 'socio-linguistic approach to narratives and stories', Denzin's (1989a) 'interpretive biography' tradition, Riessman's (1993) 'narrative analysis', Miles and Huberman's (1994) 'data display' and Coffey and Atkinson's (1996) 'narrative as chronicle'. The following are the stages of my analysis of interviews:

- **Sketch emerging ideas from the interview transcripts**

After repetitive reading of the interview transcripts and listening to the recorded interviews, I sketched emerging ideas that transpired from the interview transcripts. This helped me in suggesting tentative themes for further analysis. Multiple readings of the transcripts and numerous discussions with my supervisor helped me to identify dominant and compatible themes that were clustered together. The identification of themes allowed me to organise key concepts. A final pass through the transcripts gave me the opportunity to look for illustrative cases that could be used to identify comparisons and contrasts.



- **Write memos, comments and reflective passages in field notes**

The sketched ideas were then elaborated in the form of memos, comments and reflective passages. This exercise helped me to describe further why and how the informants made their comments. A memo is useful when a researcher wants to capture ideas and views throughout the data analysis process (Robson, 2002). My memos consisted of interview, the informants' gestures and body language and reflective comments on what was said and how they said it. Goodson and Sikes (2001) recommend making annotations or remarks concerning the informant's body language and gestures to facilitate and enhance the researcher's interpretation and understanding of the interview transcript.

- **Give codes to the initial set of materials obtained from interviews, documentary analysis, and participant observation**

The next step was to give codes to the initial themes derived from interview transcripts. From this initial comparative process, a set of key categories and sub-categories was identified. Data were coded, listed, and sorted into categories. A coding framework was established and all transcribed interviews coded. This phase of the analysis was a lengthy, flexible and evolving one that permitted the inclusion of new categories and the revision of existing ones. Miles and Huberman (1994) distinguish between first- and second-level coding. In the first-level coding, I attached labels to groups of words. As I proceeded to the second-level or 'pattern' (Robson, 2002) coding, I categorised the initial codes into a smaller number of related themes.

At this stage, I simply marked and coded the text so that they could be traced back for further analysis. Directional coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) was used to ease the tracing. The category was written next to the text and sub-heading that described the text. For example, when the text was concerned with the meaning of becoming a professor, involving 'leadership', then the particular part of the text was underlined, and in the margin 'MEANOFPROF/LEAD' was written. 'MEANOFPROF' is the category and 'LEAD' is the sub-category (See Appendix A). The content of each transcript was coded in this way, covering the themes identified. After coding the transcript, I arranged the data chunks according to appropriate themes. In so doing, I actually copied and pasted the data chunks as part of 'data reduction' (Tesch, 1990). I now had the raw and original interview transcript and the reduced transcript, arranged according to themes.

These categories and themes were linked to each other so as to build up a logical chain of evidence. This linkage enabled me to capture the general patterns and themes for further discussion and interpretation of the findings (See Appendix B). In order not to lose sight of the context in which the coded statements were located, I always referred to the full interview transcripts as an organizing device. This practice helped me to appropriately use evidence from the data in the discussion and interpretation of my research findings.

- **Try out themes on informants by identifying a set of key events and key social actors in the informant's career: Developing the career as chronicle**

The following step was to further try out themes on the informants' lives to look for regularities and patterns involving the key events and the key social actors in the informants' lives. In doing this, I adopted a combination of Coffey and Atkinson's (1996) narrative as chronicle and Labov's (1972, 1982) socio-linguistic approach to narratives and stories. I began to chart the career course stages of the professors (See Chapter 4). This is very important in developing a chronology of how they moved through different stages in their careers, as well as highlighting the key events and the key social actors who were associated with their successes and failures. The chronology also enabled me to explore and analyse how the professors experienced their academic socialisation process and managed the interaction between personal agency and social structure throughout their careers.

- **Add up the epiphanies, metaphors, analogies and concepts provided by the informants: Constructing the individuals' career stories as a database for the research report**

The chronology in the career stories was then supported by examples of epiphanies or turning points highlighted by the professors. I used the interview transcripts, field notes and research diary to link these epiphanies or turning points to the professors' job placement, promotion, recognition and the key social actors involved. These epiphanies were used to highlight how and why a number of key events had some impact on the professors'



academic development. I also used metaphors and analogies; concepts that the informants shared with me about them to further describe the essence or meaning of their career experiences and academic development. Besides these concepts, I also picked on key phrases used by each professor to provide a 'coda' (Labov, 1972, 1982) to each career story to represent their general thoughts about becoming an academic and moving on in academia. Using the professors' first person autobiographical accounts, I constructed the individual career stories to be used as a database for my research report.

- **Display data by developing diagrammatic summaries**

In order to get an overview of the professors' career stories, I displayed the data by developing diagrams and networks to see the regularities, patterns and overall themes which cut across all the informants. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest ways of displaying data for a single case and across different cases. They advise a researcher to use matrices or networks to present data. Data display enabled me to explore, to describe, and to explain the data. In this study, I displayed my data using networks. This data display included arranging and linking the professors' institutions, professional tasks and activities, key social actors and key events with a set of nodes. As mentioned earlier, I included key phrases or 'coda' at the end of each diagrammatic summary to capture how the professors made sense of their career experiences.

- **Using career stories and diagrammatic summaries for data verification**

The initial career stories and diagrammatic summaries were then shared with the professors in the data verification stage. Their feedback helped me to confirm my interpretation of their career chronicles and to reconstruct their career stories.

- **Developing a commentary for each professor through an interpretation of their career stories and the diagrammatic summaries**

Having constructed the career stories and the data display, I wrote interpretative statements that supported the accounts and quotes collected from my informants in the form of a commentary. These interpretative statements summarised the findings that I interpreted based on the career stories and the diagrammatic summaries. The interpretative statements were then expanded in my discussion and analysis chapters (Chapters 5 and 6). I used these interpretative statements as I continued to discuss, analyse and interpret the professors' career experiences in relation to the research questions, the conceptual framework of this study and literature reviewed in Chapter 2. This was the stage where my conceptual framework, based on Lave and Wenger's (1991) and Wenger's (1998) work on communities of practice (COPs), enabled me to transform and conceptualise the research findings, which were essentially descriptive, into my conceptual conclusions of the academic socialisation process.

### **3.6.4 Narrative analysis, reflectivity and reflexivity in research**

Narrative analysis involves some interesting points on when to analyse and interpret the relationship between the data and the researcher. As a researcher doing narrative analysis, I

positioned myself within my research. This calls for reflectivity and reflexivity in research. I acknowledged that 'the interpretation, explanation and analyses are inevitably shaped by my biography as a researcher' (Goodson and Sikes, 2001, p. 35) and an academic. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) suggest that a researcher doing narrative work is constantly engaged in an interpretive enterprise throughout the whole project. I realised that the discussion, analysis and interpretation of my research findings were being influenced by my own biography. As far as this study is concerned, I believed that putting myself in the research 'may enhance the rigour of my work and explicitly reveal my potential biases' (Goodson and Sikes, 2001, p. 35). According to Altheide and Johnson (1994, p. 486), reflexivity in research requires a researcher to continuously remain as an essential part of 'the setting, context, and culture he or she is trying to understand and represent'.

Reflecting on my research experience, I realised that the active subjects in my study included the informants and the researcher (myself) as well. 'Narrative analysis allows for systematic study of personal experience and meaning; how active subjects constructed events' (Riessman, 1993, p. 70). The discussion on reflexivity in research brings me to justify how I work towards establishing trustworthiness in my study. The following section explains how I established the trustworthiness of this study.



### **3.7 How I established credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability to replace the positivist criteria of internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity**

The trustworthiness of qualitative research has always been debated (Robson, 2002). Lincoln and Guba (1985) prefer the terms credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. They claim that the following four questions help to identify the trustworthiness of research reports:

1. How can one establish confidence in the truth of the findings of a particular inquiry for the subjects (respondents) with which and for the context in which the inquiry was carried out?
2. How can one determine the extent to which the findings of a particular inquiry have applicability in other contexts or with other subjects (respondents)?
3. How can one determine whether the findings of an inquiry would be repeated if the inquiry were replicated with the same (or similar) subjects (respondents) in the same (or similar) context?
4. How can one establish the degree to which the findings of an inquiry are determined by the subjects (respondents) and conditions of the inquiry and not by the biases, motivations, interests, or perspectives of the inquirer?

(Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 290)

Considering suggestions made by Lincoln and Guba (1985), Seale (2002) and Robson (2002), the following are the techniques that I used to establish credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability in my study.

- **Prolonged engagement in the field**

Prolonged engagement in the field helps to reduce both reactivity and respondent bias. 'Reactivity' refers to the way in which a researcher's presence may affect the setting and the behaviour of the informants whereas 'respondent bias' refers to safeguarding information or the giving of answers so as to impress the researcher (Robson, 2002). In order to avoid reactivity and respondent bias, I spent one year in my engagement with the informants in order to become accepted and close to my informants. This helped to develop a trusting relationship between the professors and me. They became more open and expressive in narrating their stories. My data verification stage, which was done during Summer and Autumn 2004, further developed the close relationship with the professors.

- **Member checking**

I made a point of e-mailing, telephoning and meeting my informants while analysing the data to present them with the interview transcripts and my interpretations. Member checking enables the informants to indicate their agreement or disagreement with the interpretation that the researcher had made (Seale, 2002). Besides guarding against my researcher bias, it also demonstrated that I valued the informants' perceptions and contributions to be included in the findings of the study.

- **A detailed, thick and rich description**

In order to establish transferability in my study, I provided a detailed description of the research setting and the informants to give readers adequate information on the phenomena studied. This will enable them to judge the applicability of my findings to other settings (Seale, 2002). This also justifies why I needed to use audiotaped interviews, observation and documents as the database in writing the description.

- **Research diary**

I also used a research diary in order to ensure that my data addressed the aspect of dependability. While carrying out the study, I kept a record of my research activities in the research diary. I also used the diary to document the transcripts of interviews, field notes, my research journal, the steps of how I did my coding and categorizing, and also my data analysis.

- **Triangulation**

Triangulation is another technique that I used to establish dependability in my study. Triangulation involves the use of multiple methods and sources to provide an in-depth understanding of the event and/or process studied (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Denzin (1989b) has distinguished four types of triangulation:

- Data triangulation: the use of more than one method of data collection (I used interview, documentary analysis and observation).
- Observer triangulation: using more than one observer in the study (this was not employed in my PhD project).



- Methodological triangulation: I combined some forms of biographical method, based on in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviewing, case history and oral history in carrying out my study.
- Theory triangulation: using multiple theories or perspectives (This is reflected by using theories in professional socialisation, career, learning, continuing education, as to name a few, as the framework for my argument in the study).

### **3.8 Avoiding researcher bias**

Researcher bias also influences the trustworthiness of a qualitative study. 'Researcher bias refers to what the researcher brings to the situation in terms of assumptions and preconceptions, which may in some way affect how they behave in the research setting, the persons they select for observation or interview, the kinds of questions asked, or the selection of data for reporting and analysis' (Robson, 2002, p. 172). In order to overcome this threat, I decided to use the following strategies to avoid researcher bias:

- **Peer-debriefing and support from peers (supervisor and fellow research students)**

I discussed my research progress and interpretations with my supervisor and colleagues. These peer-debriefing sessions, which were conducted after certain periods in the research setting, guarded me against researcher bias.

- **Negative case analysis as an important means of countering researcher bias**

As I interpreted the data and developed themes and theorised about the findings, I also kept myself open to instances which disconfirmed my interpretation. 'In practice, it usually amounts to developing a more elaborated version of theory and then countering this by actively seeking data which are not consonant with the researcher's conceptual framework or theory in hand' (Robson, 2002, p. 171).

All in all, the trustworthiness of the information presented in this study was enhanced through careful procedures associated with sampling, interviewing and data analysis. In terms of sampling, the purposive sampling that involves academics from the faculties of arts, medicine, science and social studies broadly represents the general population of professors at the University of Warwick. The data were analysed carefully. After transcription, the text of the original transcripts was checked against the recorded interviews and errors were corrected. I identified the text segments and subsequently verified them with the informants. Discussion on the themes was also done with my supervisor. Based on our discussions, I revised the codes where necessary and final classifications were then arrived at.

### **3.9 Reflection and methodological problems encountered in the study**

This section presents my personal reflections on the features of the methodology used and highlights the problems encountered in the study. I carried out an ongoing systematic reflection on my research project, its methodology and to what extent the data addressed

my research questions. Based on many discussions with my supervisor, I continuously checked the themes that emerged from the data with my background information, both in the introductory chapter and my review of literature. I wrote notes about the themes that I developed and compared these themes with the documents related to each professor. This was then discussed with my supervisor. At the same time, the interpretation of the interviews and the documents was again compared to the existing literature on professional socialisation, career, learning, COPs and continuing education to unravel significant findings, similarities and differences. This data interpretation activity enabled me to seek a better understanding of the central argument of my study.

Nonetheless, there are some potential methodological limitations that need to be addressed. The first is in regard to the generalisability of my (or any) case study. There are in fact, good reasons to believe that generalisations can be made from in-depth research. Coffey and Atkinson (1996), for instance, have argued that a detailed study of an individual is a means of generalising about processes which involve that particular individual. Therefore, it is not a means of generalising on all individuals having a similar position. In this study, my focus on how the professors at the University of Warwick feel and think about their past, present and future subjective experiences of academic socialisation may not be totally generalisable to professors at other universities. However, it is reasonable to assume that the findings of this study may still have some general implications for professors and other academics in experiencing their professional socialisation processes.



The second limitation is that the research findings were primarily based on discussions with the professors about their academic socialisation, the significant events and contexts that were involved in the construction of their academic identities. It was the professors' accounts that were considered as the main data for analysis and interpretation. However, I also used their curriculum vitae and other documents to supplement and complement the interview data.

Third, the professors were giving accounts of past events, situations and decisions. There is always the danger that such accounts will be coloured by current circumstances. However, an explanation of the research context in the following chapter appropriately addressed why their accounts were as such and it is up to the readers to use their fuzzy generalisation to adapt their understanding of the accounts to their own contexts.

### **3.10 Summary of the chapter**

This final section summarises the research contributions and provides some concluding remarks based on this research experience. The aim of this methodology chapter was to describe how the research was carried out. The use of 'I' helps to visualise my reflexive account and research paradigm that influenced the research at all stages. It justifies my qualitative research methodology and my epistemological stand of using in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviewing research to answer the research questions.

The interviewing of professors to gain their perceptions and experiences of academic socialisation has been used to provide detailed, meaningful representation and interpretation of how people have come to be professors. They reveal more than what can be found in their curriculum-vitae. I have decided to include quotations that add richness and depth to the stories that I am recounting. They have been valuable in bringing to the surface some of the ways in which people experience their professional socialisation processes and how their identities were being shaped. For a study concerned with academic socialisation, a research methodology and methods that highlight a detailed lived experience offered a suitable framework for analysis. It enabled me to extend my work beyond previous analyses on academic socialisation, and to link together the major themes of COPs and the formation of academic identity.

The following chapter focuses on the research context and the research informants. The next chapter will describe the career stories of the professors, which act as the database for further discussion and analysis of how they experienced academic socialisation.

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## CHAPTER 4

### The University and the Professors

#### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter summarises the profiles of the university and the professors who were involved in the study. It provides the reader with some background information on the context of the study. The first section describes the university and its faculties. The next section presents biographies or ‘career stories’ of the informants. These career stories act as the database which enables me to explore the professors’ career progression and how they experienced academic socialisation.

In describing the university, I am also presenting the reader with the organisational context in which the individual professors’ academic careers are presently based. Since I argue that an academic is a member of various communities of practice (COPs), within and outside the University of Warwick as an organisation, a discussion of broader organisational discourses, which cover other organisations including professional associations, will also be made in their career stories.

I have organised the career stories in the form of vignettes to illustrate the progress of an academic from starting out as a postgraduate student to becoming a professor. It is undeniable that career progression and academic socialisation do not always proceed in a linear way as presented in the vignettes. Nonetheless, for the purpose of this study, the construction of career stories provides the overview picture, which enables me to explore



and develop common themes covering objective careers, subjective careers, professional socialisation, organisational learning and the construction of academic identity.

Twelve professors from all the four faculties, namely Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Sciences and Faculty of Social Studies, volunteered to participate in this research. One professor from each academic department was contacted through e-mail and telephone. I also included an explanation of the research project and the nature of the biographical/in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviewing research, which requires them to be involved in a series of interviews. The participants consisted of two female and ten male professors. As the population of professors at all the academic departments in the University of Warwick consists of 45 female and 230 male professors, this sample size was therefore broadly representative.

The main purposes of this chapter are:

- to gather data via the perceptions and views of the individual professors whom I interviewed in depth.
- to illustrate how the professors from various faculties ‘understand, account for, take action, and manage’ (Arthur et al., 1999, p. 24) their career situations.
- to gain a better understanding of the prevalent academic life in the UK. This understanding involves ‘its logic, its arrangements, its explicit and implicit rules’ (Arthur et al., 1999, p. 24) through which academic careers are enacted.

#### 4.1 University of Warwick: Background information

This section provides some background information about the University of Warwick. I will therefore review literature written by authors who work, or used to work for the University of Warwick about their Warwick experience. This background information includes some historical details about the university and how the authors represented the organisational culture based on their experience working for the University of Warwick.

The University of Warwick is one of England's seven new universities which started their operation in the 1960s. The others are East Anglia, Essex, Kent, Lancaster, Sussex and York (Rich, 2001). The university was formally established in 1961 to offer a wide range of disciplines (Rich, 2001). In 1964, the first batch of students enrolled. It has so far maintained its fame for having close links with local community, industry and business, which 'opened up the prospect of a relative independence from government financial control' (Beloff, 1969, p. 147). Despite being labelled as a 'typical capitalist university' by E.P Thompson (1970) in his infamous book entitled *Warwick University Limited*, the university has so far sustained its 'entrepreneurial university' brand through various income-generating activities. Those activities range from securing research grants, research contracts and consultancy work to managing conference, residential and catering operations (Rich, 2001).

Amidst this entrepreneurial university concept, Warwick has also established its credibility for providing research-led teaching, high quality research and academic-created innovation through various departments and the provision of facilities for the

community, business and industry. The secret of this success was also recognised as the ‘Warwick Way’ (Burgess, 2001; Palfreyman, 1987; Rushton, 2001).

#### 4.2 The Warwick Way

In his book *Creating Entrepreneurial Universities*, Burton Clark (1998) describes Warwick as one of the universities which successfully responds to the needs of the community, business and industry. Rushton (2001, pp. 170-172) further discusses how the mechanisms of a successful entrepreneurial university, as listed by Clark (1998), apply to the University of Warwick. The five mechanisms of success are:

- a strengthened management core
- development and expansion at the periphery
- an increased and diversified funding base
- a stimulated academic heartland
- an integrated entrepreneurial culture

First, Warwick establishes ‘a strengthened management core’ (Rushton, 2001), through a central steering committee, which oversees its day-to-day university management. The university’s Steering Committee consists of the Vice Chancellor, Pro Vice Chancellors, four Chairs of the Faculties, Chair of the Graduate School, The President of the Student Union and a number of senior administrative officers, who meet weekly to discuss its strategic and financial planning and act immediately in the best interest of the institution (Clark, 1998; Rushton, 2001).



Second, the university developed links with industry, business and local community. Warwick expanded its opportunities to work with these external communities through the setting up of offices, which manage the university-industry, university-business and university-community working relationships. These working relationships are reflected in the creation of a number of research centres, joint venture and spin-off companies involving university and industry, the setting up of training centres and an arts centre, and the provision for continuing professional education, community development and alumni activities (Clark, 1998; Rushton, 2001).

Third, Warwick successfully generates funds by offering services to local public and private organisations. These are reflected in the entertainment and cultural programmes conducted at the university's Arts Centre, lifelong learning and continuing education opportunities offered through the Open Studies programme, and a lot of research and consultancy work carried out with the external university communities.

Fourth, despite the entrepreneurial nature of the university, Warwick continuously sustains its reliance on academic values rooted in the academic departments. The close working relationship between academics and administrators ensures that the university's entrepreneurial efforts are continuously facilitated by the academic values espoused by each academic department (Clark, 1998; Rushton, 2001). The successful entrepreneurial framework has moved in parallel with the growing number of graduate students, and 'the high scores in the Research Assessment Exercise and Quality Assurance Agency Teaching Assessment' (Rushton, 2001, p. 173).

The fifth element of an entrepreneurial university is to have an integrated entrepreneurial culture that champions 'innovation, risk taking and self-help' (Clark, 1998; Rushton, 2001). The Warwick Way is an example of an entrepreneurial culture. At Warwick, the entrepreneurial culture is also termed as the 'can-do culture' (Burgess, 2001). The adoption of this can-do culture is communicated to the staff through appraisals and internal and external media, managed by the university.

Burgess (2001) associates the success of the Warwick Way to a culture that is responsive and enhanced through immediate communication between the Steering Committee and all the departments in the university. According to Burgess (2001), the can-do organisational culture encourages academics and administrators to collaboratively promote continuous academic development in the university.

Much of this work has been aided by individual academics having the freedom to develop particular areas of research and academic development.... In the early years, founding professors were 'given their head' to develop their subject areas in whatever ways they found appropriate. It is this feature that runs deeply through Warwick's history and through many academic developments. As a consequence, some academic departments, research centres and research groups have a very sharp focus which has resulted in particular aspects of an academic field being developed rather than the shallow development of a whole subject area. (Burgess, 2001, p. 179)

The Warwick Way shapes the development of academic departments, research centres, research groups, and even the promotion and appointment of academic staff from within and outside the university. Individual academics are given the opportunities with the support of the administrative staff to shape what they believe is best for their subjects,



their teaching, and their research areas (Burgess, 2001). The Warwick Way and/or the can-do organisational culture, unites the staff to work towards sustaining Warwick as an entrepreneurial university (Palfreyman, 1987).

This brief university background provides an overview of the context where this study was conducted. The context of the study also provides the space for me as the researcher to critically examine how the situation at Warwick links to the career stories of my research informants. However, there are two aspects worth pointing out with regards to the research context of this study. First, it should be indicated that the overview was described and presented by authors who work or used to work for the University of Warwick. Thus, their representation of Warwick might not be as critical as those who examine the university from the outside. As an academic from a different university, the opportunity to analyse the Warwick experience from the outside, to an extent, enabled me to be more critical of the Warwick experience.

Another aspect that needs to be recognised is that the Warwick Way and the university's entrepreneurial culture seem to present Warwick as an elite university. Thus, I acknowledge that its organisational context may not be typical to some other UK universities. One may argue about how useful and generalisable a study on the career experiences of professors at Warwick University maybe for others. It is undeniable that each academic department, faculty and higher institution has its own distinctive culture, traditions and ways in its everyday realities. However, I agree with Delamont et al.'s (1997) suggestion on the strength of disciplinary identities, which to an extent, are



generic, cut across institutional and national boundaries and are stronger than institutional differences. This understanding suggests that the career experiences of engineering professors in Warwick might still have some similarities with the career experiences of engineering professors at Oxford, Birmingham or Portsmouth universities. Similarly, academic socialisation in sociology in Warwick has more similarities with academic socialisation in sociology in Cardiff and in Malaysian universities than with academic socialisation in chemistry in Warwick. Thus, I recognise that the career experiences of professors in Warwick presented in this thesis might not be totally generalisable to their colleagues in other universities. Nevertheless, the strength of the disciplinary identity justifies that some of the findings might still be interesting and useful for other academics to learn and adapt to their own situations and contexts.

### **4.3 The faculties**

This section provides a brief description of the faculties involved in the study. It is also important to note that the faculties at the University of Warwick only provide the organisational structure. The academic departments are more closely linked to the university administration. The academic structure in the University of Warwick consists of four faculties, namely the Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Sciences and Faculty of Social Studies. The chair of each faculty reports directly to the Steering Committee, the central administrative body of the university. Based upon the university website, Table 5 (see page 113) outlines the general information of the respective faculties. It includes a list of the academic departments and the number of professors in each faculty.

**Table 5: General information of the faculties, academic departments and professors at the University of Warwick**

Faculty	Academic Department	Female Professor	Male Professor	Total
Arts	Comparative American Studies, Classics, English, Film and Television, French, German, History, History of Art, Italian, and Theatre Studies	10	27	37
Medicine	Warwick Medical School -Division of Health in the Community -Division of Clinical Sciences -Division of Medical Education -Centre for Primary Health Care -Warwick Diabetes Care	4	16	20
Sciences	Biological Sciences, Chemistry, Computer Science, Engineering, Mathematics, Physics, Psychology, Statistics and Postgraduate Medical Education	9	107	116
Social Studies	Economics, Law, Philosophy, Politics and International Studies, Health and Social Studies, Sociology, Warwick Institute of Education and Warwick Business School	22	80	102
Total		45	230	275

*Source:* The University of Warwick Website (undated) ‘Academic Departments’. Available at: <http://www.warwick.ac.uk/departments/academic.html>  
*Accessed on:* June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2005.

#### 4.4 The profiles of informants: The professors

The profiles of the informants present readers with a better understanding of the persons being studied. The profiles or biographies of the professors describe the roles and tasks that they undertake in their career progression and academic socialisation. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, the professors' identities are hidden under a fictitious name, with the name of their faculties as their surname to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of the informants.

Each profile consists of three elements: 1) the career story, 2) the diagrammatic summary, and 3) the commentary. The career stories are constructed based on the autobiographical accounts of the professors. My interviews required the professors to describe their academic careers to date. I present their career stories in their own words but organised them through employing a combined approach using Labov's (1972, 1982) 'socio-linguistic approach to narratives and stories', Denzin's (1989a) 'interpretive biography', Riessman's (1993) 'narrative analysis' and Coffey and Atkinson's (1996) 'narrative as chronicle'. This combined approach enabled me to arrange their career stories according to a sequence of significant events, key turning points, and to highlight the key social actors that are central to their career as academics. It is also a form of 'data reduction' (Miles and Huberman, 1994) where I systematically selected the interview data and organised the career stories for further analysis. I used Labov's 'evaluation model' (Cortazzi, 1993) to organise the career stories. The elementary units and questions in Labov's evaluation model include: 1) Abstract: What was this about? 2) Orientation: Who? What? When? Where? 3) Complication: Then what happened? 4) Evaluation: So



what? 5) Result: What finally happened? and 6) Coda. These elements and questions guided me in constructing the career stories.

Next, the diagrammatic summary is a form of 'data display' (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Data display enabled me to explore and to illustrate my interpretation of the professors' career stories in graphical format. The graphical format, using a series of nodes linking the events, people and places within each career chronicle, facilitated my understanding of the professors' experiences at different stages in their careers. The systematic data display is organised in such a way as to provide brief and concise data that are manageable and instantly comprehensible for the next step of analysis and conclusion drawing.

Finally, the commentaries reveal how I interpreted and drew my initial conclusions about the professors' career experiences based on analysing their career stories and diagrammatic summaries. Besides the career stories and the diagrammatic summaries, the commentaries are also developed based on my critical examination of the professors' curriculum vitae and other related documents collected throughout the study. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), conclusion drawing also involves some forms of verification. To verify the data, I shared the career stories and the diagrammatic summaries with all the professors after the data collection phase was completed. Their feedback and comments were then used to finalise their career stories, diagrammatic summaries and commentaries. Thus, I moved among data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification cyclically during my analysis and write-up.

#### 4.4.1 Professor James Arts: Career story

I got a scholarship to go to Golden University, doing arts for 3 years. I continued with my MA at an art research institute. I went abroad on a research fellowship. I learnt other languages as part of understanding more about foreign art. A famous research institute in the UK gave me a job as lecturer. My subject area was quite young in the UK at that time. I taught postgraduates. I did my PhD at the research institute. I stayed there for 9 years. While with the institute, I also spent 2 years working as a research professor in two European countries and both have made an impact on my career. I was quite well known in Europe. I was then offered a post as a research professor in another European country. However, I decided to spend my career in the UK and so I came to Warwick as a professor. I was part of the second group that came 6 years after Warwick started. When I came, despite my early career, I was lucky because I went directly to become a professor from a lecturer.

I am surprised with two things that happened to me. Warwick's first Vice Chancellor liked getting young people and giving them responsibility. There were many remarkable people and now they are all elsewhere. I was 33 at that time. I was quite young. I was persuaded to leave the big research institute to come to a small university at that time, which has now grown to become a distinguished and great university. It was significant. Some people thought I was rather foolish but I was willing to come. One of the privileges is that I could choose my colleagues. I could choose the secretary, I could design degree courses, I could select my colleagues and I could go abroad to do all these things. Significantly, as an administrator, I made the department the first at Warwick which took PhD holders as lecturers. In the early years, people could teach without a PhD. So at Warwick, ours was the first department which insisted that all staff had to have a PhD before they are recruited. That was the opportunity and the freedom. I had excellent colleagues and some of them have now gained professorships elsewhere. At Warwick, I taught undergraduates. Another significant event in my career at Warwick was that it also enabled me to criticise the discipline I had been taught. One of the big debates was that not enough people in England, it seemed to me, had looked at my subject area as a discipline. My argument was that the subject area did not include enough about the material and culture that produced these works of art. Therefore we actually had to know about the different kinds of stone or different kinds of wood. I had the opportunity to insist that our students should learn other languages as well. I had a fellowship abroad and I persuaded colleagues that the students should also be given a term abroad. This department became a bit foreign [with the emphasis on language and the tour



abroad]. This was something quite novel. So what happened was that this pragmatic approach was then copied by some new universities. I had much more freedom because I came to a department which was quite young. So effectively, the beginning of that discipline in this university quite largely followed our initial plan. When I started, my subject area was quite young in the UK: When I started, there was only one undergraduate course in England. Therefore I had more chance of giving a particular Warwick mark to that degree. My subject area has been taught for well over 100 years in Germany. However, apart from the big research institute that I served before coming to Warwick, there were no undergraduate degree courses in this subject area offered in other UK universities. All of us who were brought in to teach our subject at that time were, in fact, teaching a new discipline. That gives you enormous freedom compared to those established subjects like classics or history. However, as the subject area became much more mainstream, I think there are still ways, especially with younger colleagues, of bringing more knowledge from other fields like psychology and technology into it.

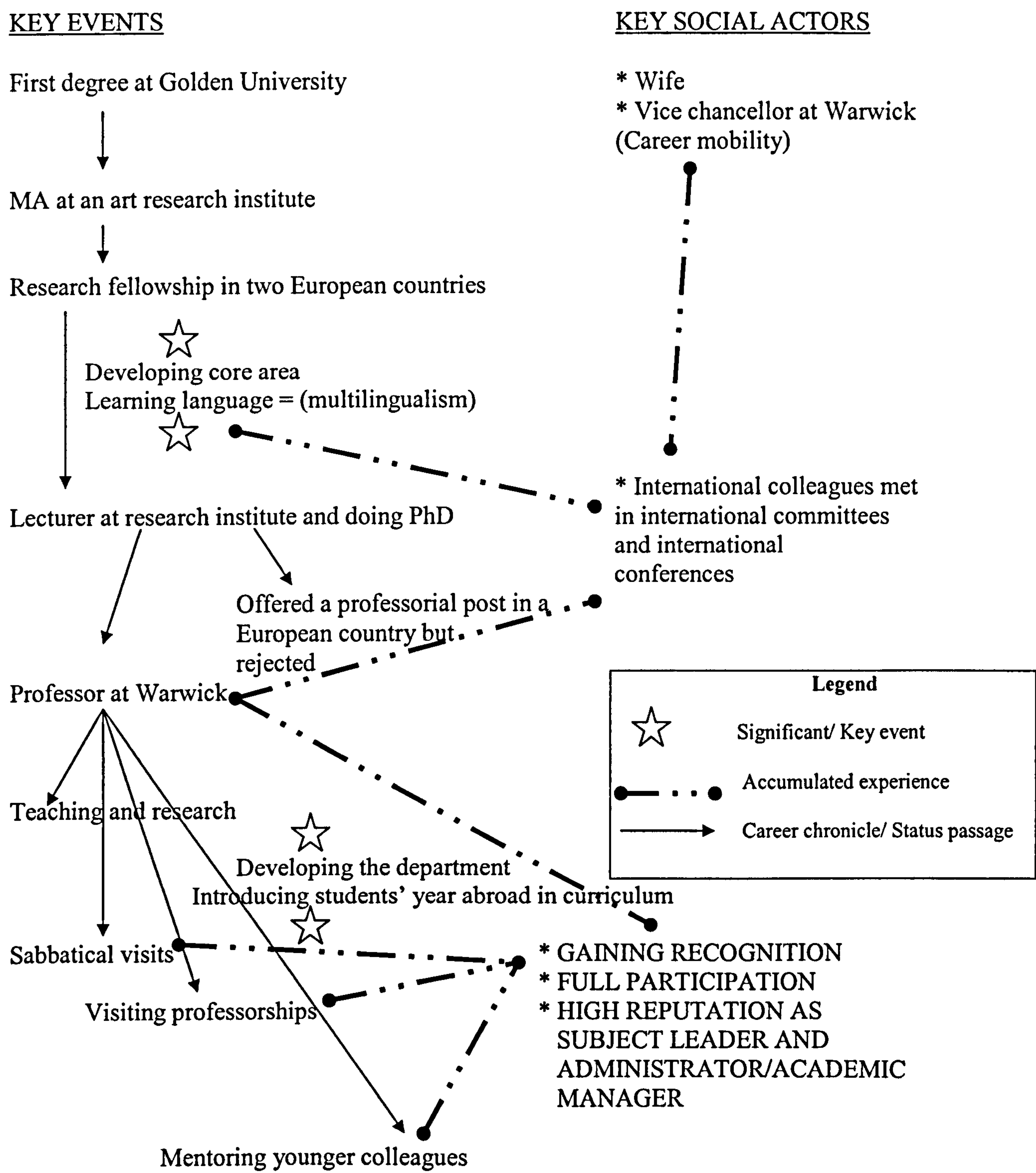
Another problem among most British scholars in my field was that most of them are monolingual. English is not the major language in my subject area. I have fluent Italian and my wife is German. I therefore have the advantage that I could go to Italy and Germany. The community in my subject area was quite small at that time. There were not many professors in my subject area in the country. So, it was easier to be known. It meant that I was put on more committees inside and outside the university. In certain intellectual committees, national representation is quite important and quite early on I sat on international committees. I became known. That opened up to more opportunities and networking. You meet people and they invite you for other events. So, I was managing a department, performing my external responsibility, as well as managing my own career. Presently, I am still serving as a fellow and a member of several international committees. My wife is also an academic in my subject area. We both like doing these things together and so we are able to travel abroad. Presently, I am also a visiting professor at two universities in the US. My advice is, as academics, travel as much as you can. Keep publishing even if you work hard in teaching. Try to publish. Indicate to people that you are contributing. I have written books and articles. I try to publish widely in German, Italian and French journals. You then get invitations. If you are invited to give talks, make sure it becomes a publication by giving it footnotes and send it to journals.



At our department, we rotate the chairmanship. It is largely a routine task. I think it is now immensely more difficult to become a senior university administrator and at the same time do research. I think you have got to decide at some stage how to balance administration and research: how to manage your administrative tasks and then to move back into research. I think being a pure administrator is not enough because a professor should also be a leading figure in his field academically. Generally speaking, I find that I can do administration. However, if I have to give up 50% of my teaching and research to do administration, I am not going to do it.

I didn't have a mentor but I think mentoring is really important. I didn't have one because I started quite early in this area. Normally my students send their manuscripts to me before publishing and they find my comments very helpful. Graduate students send me their work and they need to be pushed. I like the mentoring process: 15 to 20% of my time is spent on reading other people's work. In these things I feel that what I do is good practice. The stage of moving from theory to publishing your own research is difficult for students so you have got to help them to know which is the appropriate journal or how many words. Don't send it here, send it there and so forth. Mentoring is all about reflecting on your career. You learn the hard way: It is learning on the job. What I learnt the most is to always take responsibility and accept the consequences. Presently, I still continue to publish articles, books and monographs. My advice to young people is to take great care of one's research and get it published. People know whether you are publishing quality or quantity. Originality is very important. Do each differently and build on it. As for me, becoming a professor means having some self-confidence in your intellectual ability. I think you have the feeling that the academy has judged you to reach a certain standard for recognition. A professor has to be an authority in the discipline. Not necessarily depth but a wider command. Professorship used to mark a distinguished scholar. However now it also refers to a senior academic manager. Clearly, there are different standards between different institutions but nonetheless, academics should aim for keeping the respect of one's discipline, one's colleagues and to make sure that they recognise and respect your work. My aim would be to take on the development of my subject area and to help other people to think clearly and critically about my particular branch of knowledge. Based on my experience, the academy forms you and conditions your career only to a certain extent. This is because if you are lucky, you can change the place where you do it or you can change your discipline. You can even decide that the academy is not for you and do something else. I would not like the concept of career to change from a metaphor into a map, if you see what I mean. I think the element of choice comes in and I suspect that I have been lucky enough that I could choose a lot more.

Figure 1: How I came to be where I am today:  
Analysis for Professor James Arts



Key phrases:

“Travel as much as you can, keep publishing, indicate to people that you are contributing, reflect on your career, learn on the job, take responsibility and accept the consequences.”



### **Commentary on Professor James Arts**

Professor James Arts went to Golden University and studied his subject area for three years. After graduating, he spent a year doing his MA at a research institute. He was then granted a research fellowship in a European country. A year later, he began his lecturing career at an art research institute. He also decided to do his PhD. He spent eight years at the research institute before coming to Warwick University as a professor. James's narrative highlights some key social actors in his academic career. James is lucky that his wife, also an academic, has been very supportive throughout his career. They discuss each other's work and travel together to visit and learn more about their subject areas. Another key social actor central to James's academic career was the vice chancellor at the time he joined Warwick. He encouraged James to develop and shape the department using his previous experience working at various art institutes in the UK and abroad. The young James took this responsibility enthusiastically, recruited colleagues from other places, and designed the curriculum of the academic courses. James's early experiences working with colleagues abroad and his interest to learn more about other languages and cultures became a key event in shaping his future career. He was lucky that not many British scholars in his field were multilingual at that time. With this added advantage, James was able to contribute on a wider scale and eventually became an international figure in his field of study. James's personal decision to spend his career in the UK and coming to Warwick was another key turning point in James's career. The move provided more opportunities for him to develop his academic discipline and his career as a successful university teacher, researcher and academic manager.



#### 4.4.2 Professor Ronald Arts: Career story

I was very fortunate. One of the significant events in my academic career is that I graduated from Young University in the US. It is a top university in my subject area. I did my undergraduate there and a certificate in Germany. I went back to the US and continued with my Masters and PhD. Young is a top, conservatoire academia, competitive in the teaching of my subject area and that has been a career advantage to me. The doctoral program was very selective and I was lucky to be in. We were called the Young Mafia in our subject area in America. The top people were there and it just opened doors. The 'Young' name has a cash value. I was taken seriously as a young scholar with a Young University pedigree. It has been a triumphant element in my career. At Young, I was also fortunate that I was a research assistant for a top arts researcher in the world, a German named Professor Franz Arts. We speak German to each other and he likes my work. He hired me as a researcher and that was lucky in the sense that he gave me good training and contact. He was influential in my subject area and that really helps. Mentoring is absolutely crucial, especially at Young University with Professor Franz. He assisted in my career because you do get a body of experience working with him. He said try this and don't do that. So it depends a lot on that kind of collegiality. I like the informal mentoring. An academic's job is a vocation. You are there because you are curious. It is a whole way of life. You want to ask questions; you want to work on those questions: so you exemplify informality. Formal structure is not that authentic, as you need to find time where you can interact with other colleagues. I believe that one of the ways to progress in an academic career is to gain recognition in your field and your communities of scholars. Obviously make your work known and get them published. I got an early start by publishing a number of articles even when I was a PhD student.

[While doing his PhD, Ronald also took a post as a Teaching Associate/ Visiting lecturer at the university. After completing his PhD, he went to become an assistant professor at an art college in the US. As an assistant professor who was also chairing one of the departments, he stayed there for two years before heading for UK to join Warwick University as a lecturer. Eventually he became a senior lecturer, reader and now a professor]. I am obviously an American: naturally, aggressiveness is acceptable. I was lucky in the sense that not many British universities offered my subject area in those days. Now there are quite a lot. Back in the 1970s, Warwick was the earliest place to establish a department in my subject area. So there were not many British scholars in this field. When the job was advertised, I applied and I got it. Coincidentally, the

department was headed by a Canadian academic. He was so happy to know that somebody from Young University was interested in the job. So I walked into the job. It was a good start for everyone at the department. I was involved in a department that was developing. I was able to shape the department and to project my interest with the way the department was formed. I was lucky that being an American, I could be assertive and entrepreneurial. Fifteen years ago, my style of searching for grants and publications was regarded as aggressive, entrepreneurial and having grand ideas. My style opens doors and I got away with things. I love getting grants to develop my research and consultancy projects. So in a way, I got started early. I was very fortunate when I did work on a famous European artist. The work on him is immensely important in my subject area. Very few are written in English. [Ronald mastered several languages: Latin, German and Italian]. The opportunity actually came by accident. I had a conversation with a colleague that I knew a bit about this famous artist. Through him, I was then offered by Cambridge University Press to write something about that artist. As a young scholar, I felt that the invitation should be taken seriously and eventually it opened up many more opportunities. The book is published, giving me the reputation and recognition. That really helped. There is a place linked to this famous artist in Germany. It was an extraordinary place. I was working in East Germany in 1992, when the wall came down. I and several others formed an organisation that took possession of that place. It was satisfying when the army marched out we marched in! Despite the dilapidation, we managed to get a grant to do some work on the place. It was very satisfying and later becomes an inspiration. I will go back there soon [July 2003] as there will be a performance on the artist, a premiere, a talk and I like making contributions.

Some of my colleagues said that I have chosen a research area that brings me to interesting places. Throughout my career, I travel a lot. It is a pleasant experience to go to all these interesting places to explore antiques and ancient places. It is fascinating and satisfying.

The other significant event in my career comes from the frustration of talking in front of the board about space, time and movement. I asked myself why not go and make videos? So, I began my educational videos which gave me the chance to say what I liked. I sold these videos here and abroad. Back in the 1980s I organised my lecture tours in America. My lecture tours were fun and gave me a name. I went around to quite a number of places that gave me the opportunity to talk. I make a point of going to conferences on my subject area. You get known and that heightens the connecting and networking.



I am also interested in combining technology with arts. Virtual reality: I can do it evocatively; I can imagine; I can look at a thing sideways via technology and my imagination. Well, my subject area is about moving and interacting. It is a physical art form: it is not like a poem. The virtual reality enables you to take and to create imitation. You can move the mouse to go from one place to the other and you can walk through ancient buildings. You can decide from where you wish to view the performance. Where is the best seat? Who is sitting there? A priest? A third class citizen? The virtual reality technology is good at communicating ideas. I could see quite quickly that this could be successfully implemented. Not much had been done in this area. I got some publications based on this work and I got grants to go to conferences, to improve the work and I eventually became known for that research area.

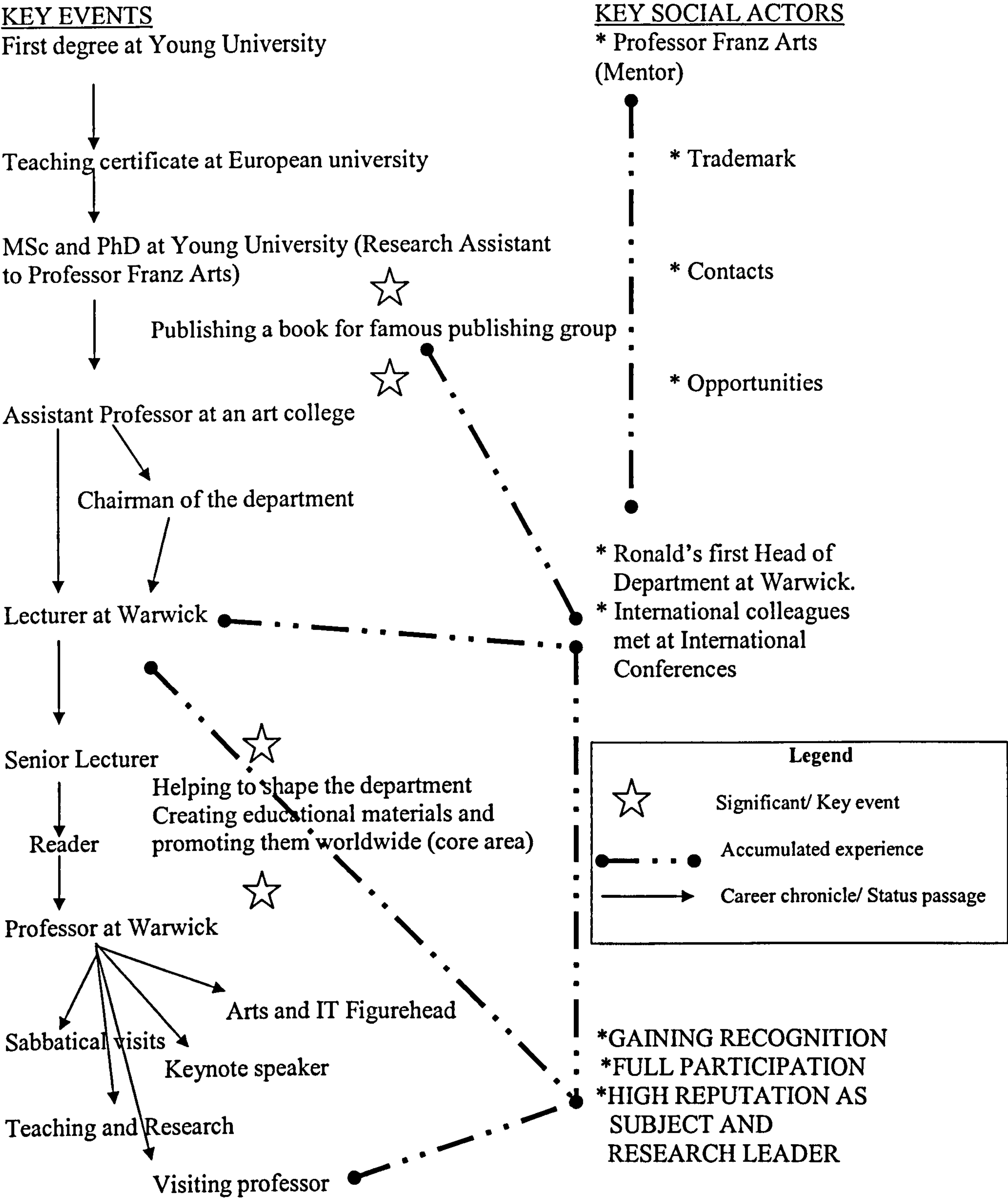
Throughout my career I also went abroad for some sabbatical visits. I was a visiting professor at two universities in the US. I worked at a number of art museums. I am a member of several professional associations and committees. At the same time, I continued publishing books, articles and giving talks at various conferences, and invitation lectures at various universities.

I always believe that people who go into scholarship need a high degree of autonomy in order to express their creativity. They need to be allowed the space and the time to do that. I grew up in an environment of a community of scholars. Everybody is working towards scholarship: student, lecturer, senior lecturer and professor - you are doing the same job. My ideas are that we remain the same. The quest for knowledge and truth should be our goal.

On becoming a professor: I work towards providing some leadership, being an example, establishing my own work and communicating learning. It is part of being a good citizen in the communities of scholarship and helping the younger ones in developing their careers. What keeps me going is the wish and the desire that I can continue to do the things that I do well, which is to better myself, my discipline, the other scholars in my field and the students that I work with.



Figure 2: How I came to be where I am today:  
Analysis for Professor Ronald Arts



Key phrases:  
“Obviously make your work known. Get them published. Be a good citizen in the academic communities.”

## **Commentary on Professor Ronald Arts**

Professor Ronald Arts was an undergraduate at Young, a prestigious university in the US. After getting his first degree, he went to Europe to do a teaching certificate. Then, he went back to the US to do his Masters and PhD. After completing his PhD, he became an assistant professor at an art college in the US. After two years, Ronald came to the UK to join Warwick University as a lecturer. He later became senior lecturer, then reader and professor. Ronald occasionally took sabbatical leaves and served at a number of American universities. Ronald's biography indicates some significant people or key actors in his academic career. Professor Franz Arts transformed Ronald's style of approaching research and teaching in his subject area. Ronald's first head of department at Warwick provided the opportunity for him to develop and shape the department using his previous work experience. The continuous recognition of his colleagues, both at his department and in other professional communities, facilitated Ronald's academic socialisation. Ronald's career story reveals some key events in his career. His experience working with Professor Franz Arts provided the early invitation into communities of scholars. Ronald's decision to come to Warwick was another turning point in his career. Being one of the UK's early scholars in his subject area enabled Ronald to actively contribute to his academic discipline. His interest in writing about an artist landed the young Ronald an opportunity to publish with a famous publisher. Another key event in Ronald's career stemmed from his frustration with his teaching aids. Ronald's idea of combining technology with arts and his educational videos eventually became widely recognised as innovative teaching tools. He developed an international reputation and since then, has been linked to various academic networks both in and outside the UK.



#### 4.4.3 Professor Matt Arts: Career story

I was a student at Golden University. In my final year, I wondered what I wanted to do: I was very uncertain. I come from an academic family. My father was a professor and a pro vice chancellor and my grandfather was a professor and a vice chancellor. However, I decided to go off and become a civil servant for 3 years. I was not absolutely certain that I wanted to go into the family profession. I joined the civil service, which was potentially very interesting. You have intelligent people as colleagues. Sometimes the work can be very challenging. Being in the civil service, you learn to prioritise work, you learn how to operate on a committee, you learn how to take notes for a committee, and learn how to be quite precise with language as well, especially in writing. One of the things that I did quite regularly was to produce parliamentary answers that the prime minister and minister read out during parliamentary questions. Writing those is a very considerable art because you have got to be very careful with language. You mustn't say too much. You mustn't say anything more than you literally mean because if you say too much, people and politicians will jump on it. So you have got to be very focused. I remember the first answer that I drafted. It was very imprecise: it said the right thing but the language was too flowery. And the person for whom I worked for threw the paper and said "No! You must think, you've got to think about the word that you choose to use." So, it was an education in using language, as well as an education in how to get administrative things done and I suppose it has served me. It probably influences my career, the way I do things. I was in the civil service for three years during which time I learnt a lot about administration, which has undoubtedly been very useful in the long run, but I also became very bored. I decided that what I really did like was thinking: academic research. I did love art, I'm an art graduate and I felt that I might as well have a go at studying art further, seeing whether I could establish an academic career. If I failed I knew that I could go back to the civil service. I had a safety net. So after three years, I gave up my job and returned to university to undertake postgraduate research.

My doctoral research took 4 years. I was then fortunate to receive a research fellowship for 3 years at Golden University. In the early 1980s, at a time of a contraction in universities, there were very few jobs and so I began to wonder if I had made the right decision. I was fortunate enough to get a job in Santa University. In terms of significant events, I suppose two things happened at Santa University, which retrospectively have made a difference in my career. One is that I was asked to co-edit a volume of a respected journal. This was a fairly high-profile and high-prestige project. It was quite an honour to be asked to be involved for a fairly young scholar.



I was asked because someone else pulled out, and they needed to find someone in this particular area within a fairly short notice. I suppose they took a gamble on me. But that obviously raised my profile. It allowed me to demonstrate that I was quite an effective editor and since then, I have done quite a lot of editing. People know that I get things done as editor and that means that you also network into different academic groupings much more closely. That made a difference in terms of my profile, and it did also shift me from being a lone researcher to someone who works with other people in order to help them to produce work. The second thing which I was asked to do was to try to increase the number of postgraduates in our area at Santa University. We decided to make it a major effort, and someone had to organise this and that was really my first significant academic organisational responsibility. It was quite challenging and in the few years that I was doing it we did manage to increase the number of students. For me, it was a worthwhile achievement. These two things pushed me from being a researcher cum teacher, a traditional young academic, into becoming someone who also does other things for colleagues through developing postgraduates and through editing other people's work. I stayed at Santa as Lecturer then Reader and finally Professor. Those two things may also have been quite significant in my obtaining a job in Warwick, because at that particular moment when Warwick was appointing a new chair here, they wanted someone who could develop a new department.

I moved to Warwick as a Professor of this department which had not been very successful, and I was appointed to try to bring it up. Now it has become one of the departments with a strong postgraduate research community. I eventually chaired the department and the faculty as well. So, those were the major administrative and staff development projects undertaken. Because I was quite closely involved in staff development issues I suppose that eventually the Vice Chancellor asked me whether I would chair a committee at the university level. Looking back, you can see the logic of it. But I had not thought of going out and saying that I really wanted to do staff development. Perhaps as a consequence of doing certain university projects, as well as running a department that begins to go in the right direction, I then got asked to do more university activities; I was asked to sit on more university committees. There is some satisfaction at certain occasions, for example, being able to do things for academic colleagues and making some differences in their lives through seeking promotion, securing pay-rises and securing better conditions of work.

So, the crucial thing I find in my career is maintaining a balance between preparing the teaching I'm doing, and in particular grading and returning marks to students relatively quickly, trying to



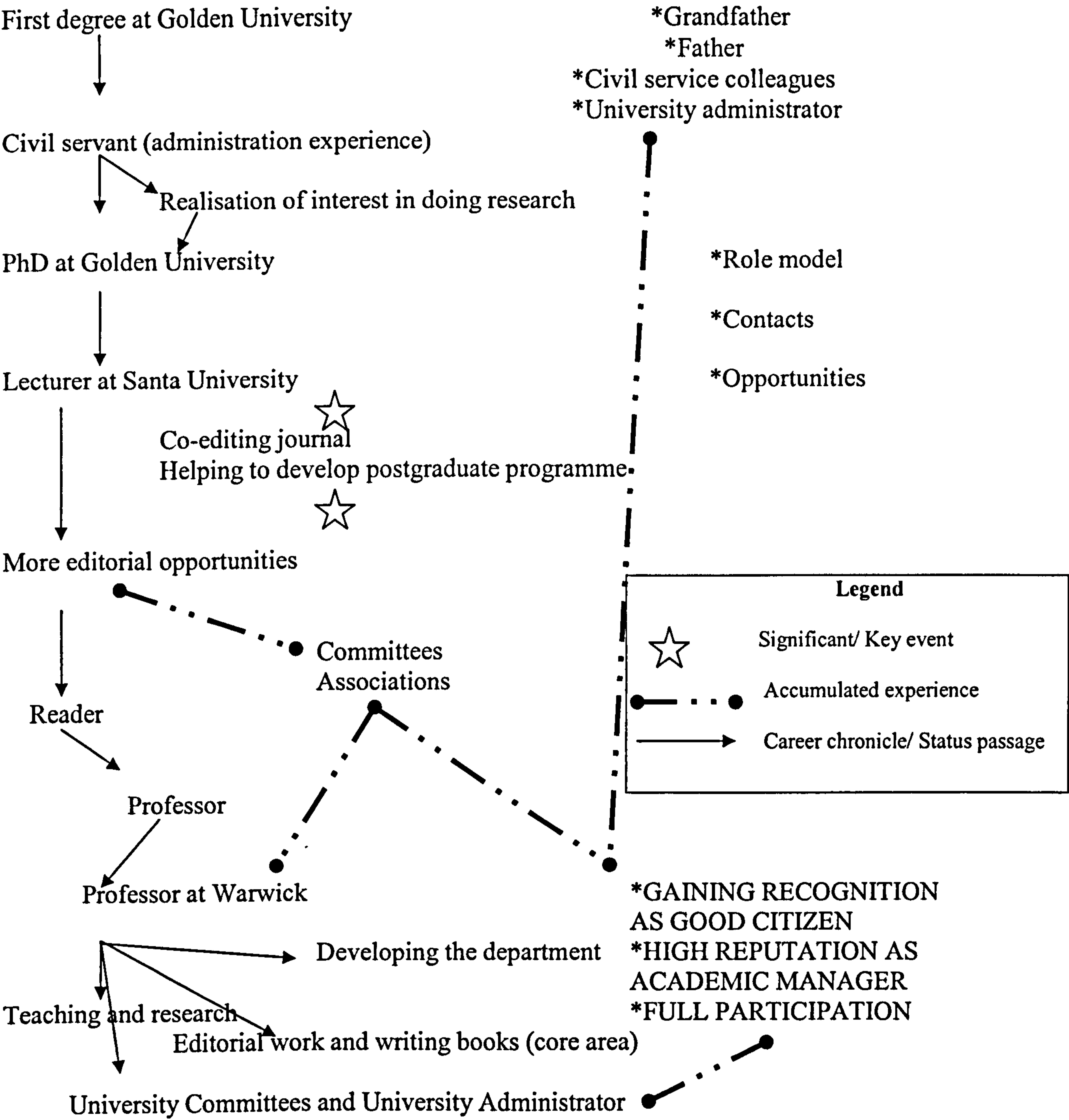
be around at a reasonable level for students and balancing other commitments like research, editorial work and administration. It is a question of balancing between those areas. Something that we haven't discussed is private life. If you've got a family, especially if you've got a young family like I have, then there are quite a lot of considerable external demands. I am aware that I certainly realised this when I was growing up myself. My father was regularly invisible. He regularly worked on Sunday afternoons, tended to go to the office on Saturday. He was not visible as a family person and I try to be a bit better than that. But it is not easy. So with the family aspects as well, there are probably four things you have to juggle. We can compartmentalise things to a certain extent but not completely.

I think the main thing that I can say about my academic career is that it has been governed by accident. If you look back you can see that there is perhaps a logical progression that you build on with experience. And things make sense but certainly as I have gone through it, there has never been a stage at which I have said, "Right, it is very sensible to do this now because in two years', or four years' time, I will therefore be able to do that." That is not the way that things work out. There was no planning. It is haphazard. And then the events which happened around research were very much incidental, though they were quite important. So that is my overall career. From slightly uncertain, starting as a researcher, through learning that I actually rather liked teaching, as well as doing research. One of the consequences in the academic world, of being reasonably efficient at administration is that people will ask you to do things. So if you can do it, you tend to get asked. So, I simply drifted almost into being an academic administrator, who also researches and also does a bit of teaching. I am considering how I have made this move. I didn't know that perhaps somebody in the administration had a grand plan so that my career should develop and I was pushed as such so that I ended up in this position. Maybe the agency for this is somewhere else. There is certainly some input from oneself but I also realise that there must also be some input from elsewhere. I would like to think that I am in control of my career, but I also suspect that other people have been thinking rather further ahead. It certainly was not planning on my part. I never saw staff development as something that would lead me to assume greater administration responsibility. I just find it quite important. Contributing to the leadership of the university is something that is enjoyable, and our capacity to influence national debates is something that keeps me going. I regard it as something that needs to be done. Apart from that, productivity in producing quality research, making sacrifices for the faculty and hard work, I suppose, contributed to my career development. And so I did it. It is terribly haphazard.

Figure 3: How I came to be where I am today:  
Analysis for Professor Matt Arts

KEY EVENTS

KEY SOCIAL ACTORS



Key phrases:

“I have produced reasonable quality research at quite a high rate and have been reasonably productive in making sacrifices for the faculty (administrative work). I learnt to understand how the university system works locally and internationally.”



### **Commentary on Professor Matt Arts**

Professor Matt Arts was an undergraduate at Golden University. After graduation, he decided to become a civil servant. Matt eventually realised that his interest was more in doing academic research. He returned to Golden to do a PhD. He then took a lecturing job at Santa University. Besides teaching and research, Matt's editorial and administrative skills contributed much to his career advancement. He was then promoted to reader and finally professor. He then left Santa and came to Warwick. As the chair of the department, Matt transformed it from a lower ranking art department in the UK to an established institution with highly acclaimed academic programmes. During the course of this research, Matt was appointed as one of the university's key principal academic administrators. Matt's narrative highlights some key social actors in his academic career. Matt's grandfather and father who were also academics, had been very supportive throughout his career. Other key social actors that were central to Matt's career were his civil service colleagues who taught him how to use language with precision and how to operate in committees. The university administrators at Warwick, also key social actors in Matt's career, provided the opportunity for him to develop and shape the department using his previous work experience. Working at Santa and Warwick provided some key events in Matt's career. The editorial opportunity converted Matt from a young academic to an effective editor. That event became a critical point in shaping his future career. Another key event that transformed Matt from a young academic into a mature academic leader was his decision to come to Warwick. Warwick gave him the opportunity to develop his department using his experience working at Santa University. Matt continuously associates himself with being a good citizen in academia.

#### 4.4.4 Professor Charles Arts: Career story

I was an undergraduate at Castle University. Being taught by a number of impressive lecturers, I became very much interested in an academic career. I took the subject seriously. The reason for going to Castle was its strength and extensive connection abroad, particularly in the US. So when I was a student, I was given the opportunity to go to the US and Venice to do research and I managed to publish an article and get my early participation within the communities of scholars.

Then I got a scholarship to go to the graduate programme at Boulevard University. It was the best training one could get: undergraduate in the UK and postgraduate in the US. My fellow graduate school colleagues were very enthusiastic and they created a very interesting and creative environment. The program was really extraordinary. While doing my PhD, I also became a teaching fellow for two years at Boulevard. This experience confirmed me that I was going into a career that I wanted to do. However, I eventually found that jobs in my field in the US at that time were a bit scarce. In Britain there was quite an expansion. I applied for two jobs in England. I got one and I went to New University.

New University was where I started my formal career as an academic. Obviously getting a job is important and significant. The need to prove that you can complete a project is important for an academic. However, I was hired at New University before I finished my PhD. That rarely happens today. The university did it but it was not common. I had a job for life; I could always stop but I think there was this culture of trust at New University. Teaching at Boulevard provided a good experience for teaching at New University, despite the slightly different systems between the two.

As a graduate student I had colleagues who gradually became my community of scholars whom I meet at conferences. Then from that group, I got invited to join one of the editorial boards of a journal. We have groups in several US states who meet and each group takes responsibility to get the journal done and also network. We often keep in touch. Though not in the same profession, we keep meeting at conferences and reinforcing our networks. That was interrupted occasionally, as I was also doing and developing my PhD project. I got to know and network with people involved in history, economy and politics. Then I came back to the UK and eventually I got links to network with those American colleagues as I set up one committee in the UK. I continued to



travel from time to time between the UK and US. By the late 1980s, if I went to a conference, I normally met people that I knew. That group linked with another group in the US, and that became another network. I became adviser to both the UK and US networks. The result is that I can go to any of these conferences. I get projects and work to do. I sometimes skip the sessions to arrange these networks.

There was also a period when I decided to get a job in the US. I attended a major conference. In the 80s I actually had 2 offers while working at New University: to go to a university and a research institution in the US for my research fellowship. Both places developed the network. My PhD supervisor was somebody influential and that further added to the network. However, I don't think my career resulted from the door being opened by somebody else or some influential people. Probably the way it works is that I was self-initiated; I had found myself working in overlapping networks without the interference of any influential people. Quite a lot of people knew me and I was useful for them in terms of book reviews and reading manuscripts. I continued getting visiting lectureships, funding and scholarship to do research at various places. These opportunities eventually got interconnected.

As books are so important in my field, publishers are another strand in the network. I did have their help: they published my books. I went to major conferences and it is there that one markets books and manuscripts. Academic and publisher interaction takes place in the open and it is very interesting to examine this interaction. The publisher knows who is who and they are extremely good at it, whereas for us that is not the reason for our business. We are academics. The academics usually view the connecting part as more important.

By then I was promoted from lecturer to senior lecturer and finally professor at New University. I continued to find academic work absorbing with all the challenges and projects to be done. In the early 1990s, my wife changed her career to become an academic. She was at Warwick and I was still at New University. Towards the end of my time at New University, I did feel that I had been there for a long time. It was not that I felt trapped there as I was always there voluntarily. I knew that I could have left if I had wanted to and find something else. I just had the sense that it was time for change really. At Warwick a colleague passed away and so I came. If not, I would have had to wait but the opportunity came. So when the job became available here, I came to Warwick.



Once here, I was invited to join various university committees and undertake various administrative tasks. I continued writing books and essays, giving public lectures, editing other people's work and getting involved in various professional activities. However, I had never been actively and particularly conscious in looking at my promotion as developing my reputation. My tendency has been to do what I want to do to my subject. I tend to get things done with the flow. The goals in my academic career are set out in terms of research projects and things that I want to do with my colleagues. It is a matter of exploring new ways of thinking about my work and how it fits with that of others. Being inquisitive, critical and having an open mind about what I was doing helped me in becoming a better academic. Students and colleagues seem to respond to enthusiasm and commitment. That is a great gift to give to other people. You have to love it [your subject area]. I suppose that either you do or you don't. I guess if you don't, you are not an academic or you would not want to become an academic. You should be doing other things that you would appreciate better.

What I want to do is to continue writing books and articles in my field. I would like to be able to look back and see that I have achieved something. I see each process as a challenge. In scholarship, you want to write the next book and the topic because it is there. You just continue identifying the gaps. It is simply a challenge. It is a new area, a new territory and I have no idea how it might be interesting. There is no limit to what you can study. There are no holes to put together. Any field in the past is like a cake. Part of what you are doing is slicing it. Each slicing connects to a point, with regional to international implications. To embark on work that has not been discovered is interesting as it connects to new ways of looking into things. I enjoy teaching and seeing students doing that. I also began to find administration to be interesting. Academic work with research, teaching and administration has been very absorbing until now. I guess I might not be going into something else.

**Figure 4: How I came to be where I am today:  
Analysis for Professor Charles Arts**

### KEY EVENTS

First degree at Castle University

Travelling abroad as undergraduate  
Publishing article based on travelling assignment

Secured scholarship to do MA at Boulevard University

Teaching fellow at Boulevard University

Job-search = scarce and competitive in the US

Lecturer at New University and doing PhD at Boulevard University

Senior lecturer

Professor

Professor at Warwick

Sabbatical visits

Research

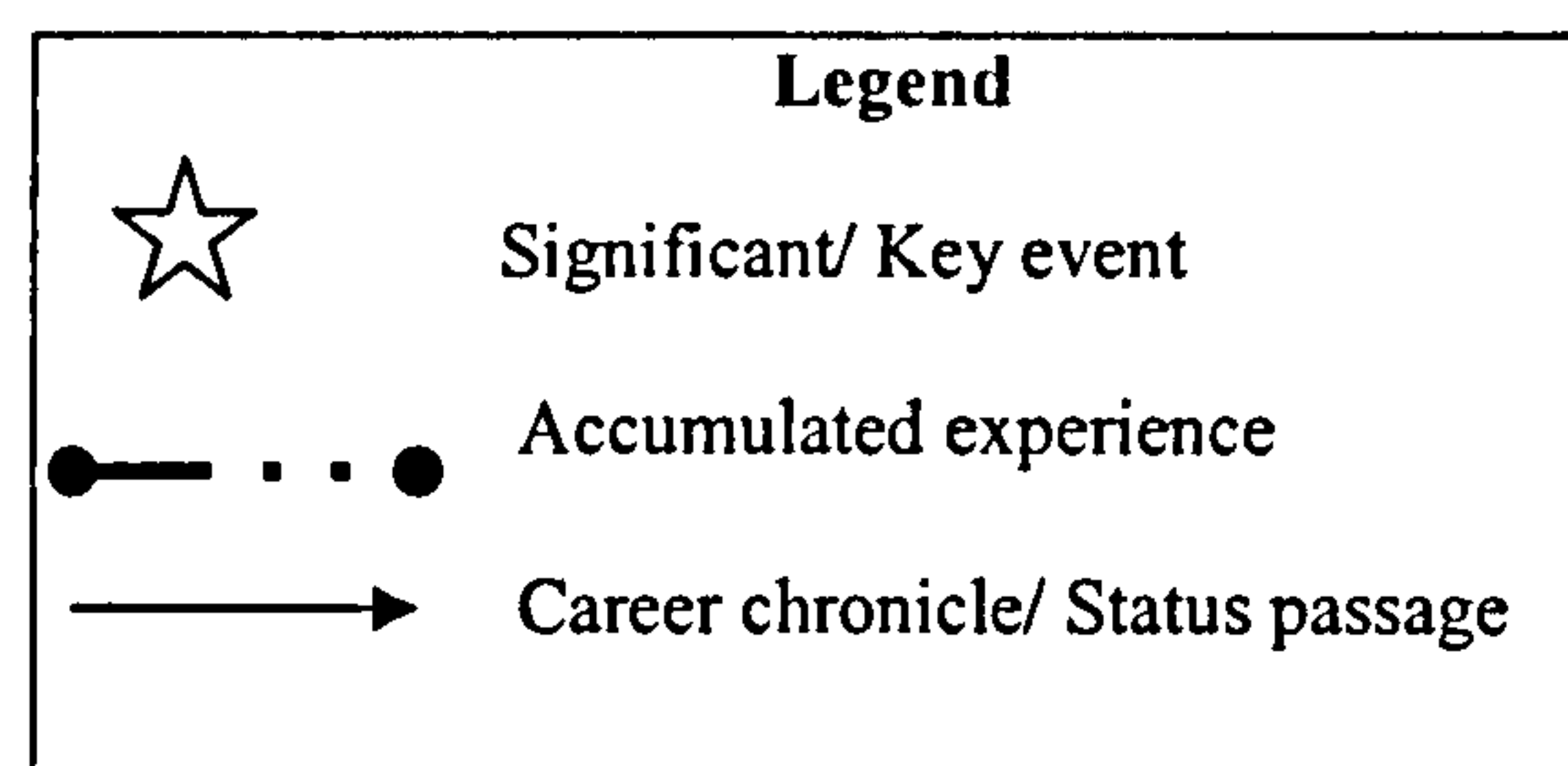
Administrative and teaching responsibilities

Editorial work and writing books and articles

### KEY SOCIAL ACTORS

\*Fellow graduate students

\*Colleagues in associations



Network and opportunities

Travelling between the US and UK (developing core area)

Fellowship in the US and the UK

Active participation in various associations and conferences



### Key phrases:

“The need to prove that you can complete a project is important for an academic. I was self-motivated all the way through. I have found myself working in overlapping networks without the interference of any influential people. You rely on various communities of practice.”



### **Commentary on Professor Charles Arts**

Professor Charles Arts completed his undergraduate study at Castle University. Charles developed a strong interest in his field of study and started publishing articles and writings. He got a scholarship to pursue his postgraduate education at Boulevard University in the US. After graduating with an MA, Charles secured a post as teaching fellow at Boulevard. After three years teaching there, he decided to apply for a permanent job and got a lectureship at New University in the UK. At the same time he embarked on his PhD study at Boulevard. He travelled from the UK to the US and vice-versa, during his period of study. In the course of his career at New University, Charles was promoted from lecturer to senior lecturer and, four years later, professor. After serving as a professor for two years, Charles moved to Warwick. Charles's narrative shows some key social actors in his academic career. They are his colleagues during his postgraduate education and in his various professional associations. He became an active participant in various professional networks in the UK and the US. Studying at Castle and Boulevard were part of the key events in Charles's career. They formed a strong foundation for his successful academic career. Charles's decision to work at New University became another critical point in shaping his future career. As there were not many British scholars in his subject area at that time, Charles developed a strong link between his networks in the US and in the UK. He eventually became one of the key figures in his subject area in the UK. The decision to come to Warwick was another turning point in Charles's career. The move provided more opportunities for him to develop his subject area and his career as a successful university teacher, researcher and academic manager.



#### 4.4.5 Professor John Medicine: Career story

When I was a student at Avon University, one of the lecturers impressed me as an academic GP. He combined general practice and research: he combined theory and practice. He was the role model and that created the interest. There was this 'outside' area that provided interesting questions, which gave me more satisfaction. As a student, you learn a lot about facts but that does not necessarily give you the research skills and the intellectual challenges. I wanted the intellectual challenge of doing research. It is very enjoyable as it gives me the practical as well as the theoretical satisfaction. My interest is focused on the mix of both academic work and general practice. I decided to become an academic focusing on my existing subject area. When I qualified as a general practitioner, I decided to do my application training and clinical academic career at Golden University Hospital. I did my general practice with a partner and I also spent a year researching on general practice. Eventually, I was lucky that a job that I wanted was advertised. I applied and I was then appointed as a lecturer in General Practice at Royal Medical School. At Royal, I joined a small department. There were 2 to 3 academics who were also General Practitioners.

However, not much research was done there. Royal was very much focused on undergraduate teaching. The head of department did not articulate that clearly to me. I introduced the first large-scale research project into the department, although there were some small-scale research projects that were ongoing. I built up the research programme. I did not go to any formal research training and there were also no senior and seasoned academic staff to help me. So, it was self-learning. It is important to have some sense of what is expected of you to achieve. It is important for the environment to be enabling, with very little restrictions. My experience with my professor at Royal is that he used a very 'hands-off' approach. People were allowed to go their own way and let things happen. He was not very much into the research activities. He was more interested in the teaching side and not really involved with our research project. The risk is that if one's Head of Department is not interested, somebody might not be achieving much. Conversely, if you are very strict, there is a possibility that what the Head of Department wants does not interest the individual academic. However, some departments become successful by being prescriptive so they can develop a lot of research. They attract people to come in. It works like an enterprise. I believe that if the department aspires to become an academic organisation with world-class reputation in research, they have to be more explicit. If not, people won't come in. I still wish that I had been in a more established academic environment with more excellent opportunities for research. I guess my career would have risen more quickly and flourished. Who knows, perhaps if

I had worked with a more experienced and seasoned researcher, and in a more structured environment, I would have gone further and higher.

Yet, when I was at Royal, I carried out 5 surgeries a week and that again combined my practical and research work. Eventually, I got promoted to senior lecturer and after 5 years came to Warwick as a professor. Like Royal, the same process works at Warwick. I was appointed to chair a department and I was asked to set up the running of it. Again, I used my entrepreneurial skills to develop it. The department is a self-funded programme. There was no clear picture. My department got external funding and we were not attached to the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), but we were answerable to the university. I was still performing surgery, at least 2 surgeries every week because that sustained my clinical work. Now as it is being merged into the medical school, we joined the RAE and now there is a much clearer expectation by the university. Joining the medical school means more scrutiny, accountability and explicit expectations. However, it would be nice to work in an academic environment whereby I can learn from the seniors. I hope there will be more possibilities of working with some interesting people.

As far as significant events in my career are concerned, I think there were the elements of good luck and opportunities when I needed them. First, at Golden, I was doing a year and I decided to go down the academic career path. There are not many medical academic posts being advertised and most were on teaching rather than research. I was lucky and it was a great luck that Royal advertised a medical academic post focusing on research. That was very significant and I took the opportunity. It was very difficult to embark on my career path and I believe it came at the right time.

Second, I was lucky in the sense that the research that I undertook was very top priority at that time. My subject area which used to be young and new 10 and 15 years back, has, at present, been given important attention and I am lucky to be in it. It attracts research funding and it has kept on going over 10 years. My subject area in fact is relevant to policy. It was in fact ahead of the policy and became the leading edge for policy. That was a fortuitous effort. This subject area attracts major policy makers. It was quite easy to get funding and develop a research team.

Third, getting my doctorate. There was not any kind of expectation from my department. Others were not doing it: it was pretty much self-motivated. A doctorate was not seen as important because academic careers in general practice do not require you to have a doctorate. I felt that it



was significant to get a doctorate. I did not have a formal mentor or coach. However, there were some very good colleagues at Royal. There was peer support and there were also some good networks. I was part of those networks and they were very supportive.

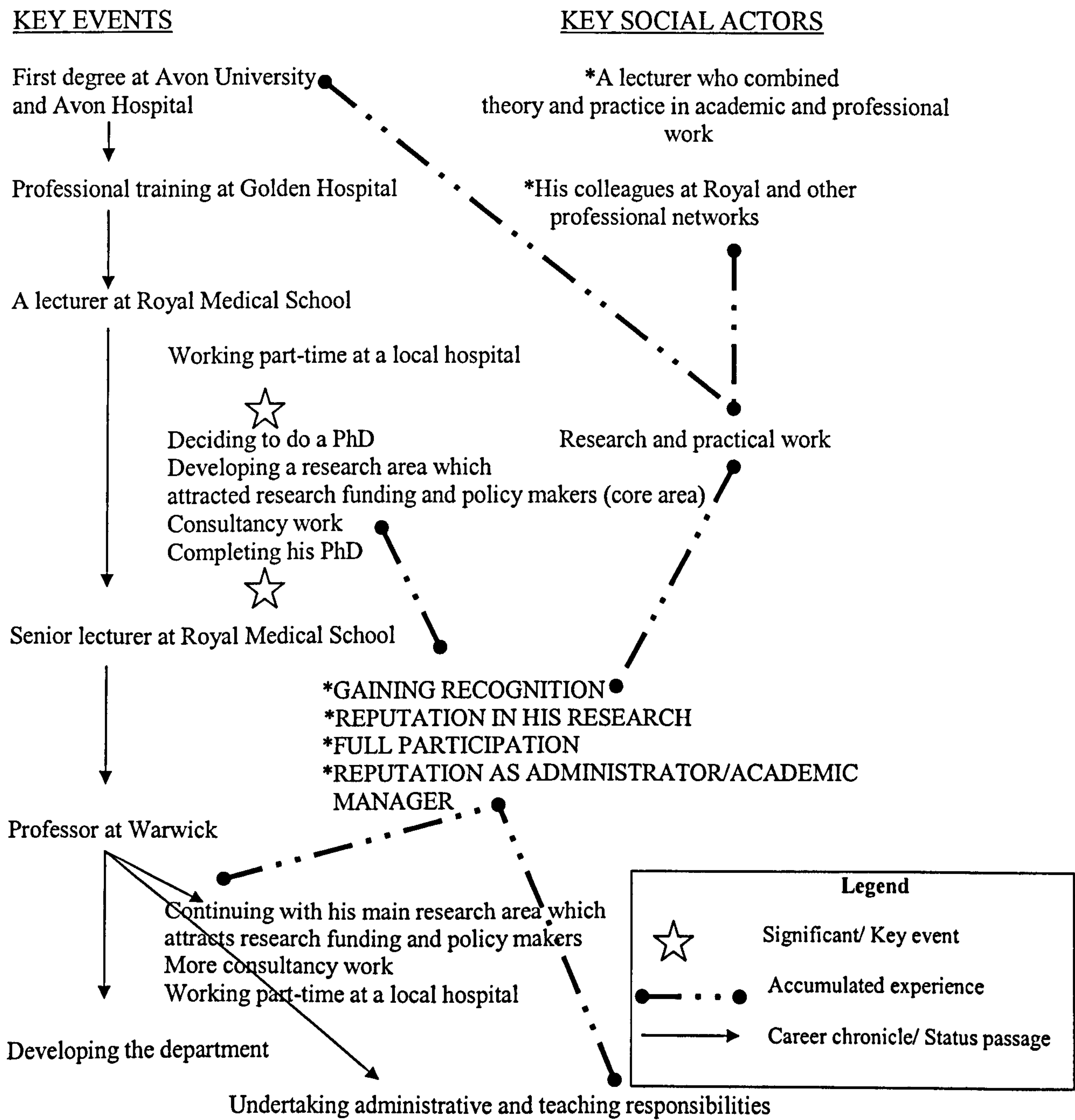
Fourth, the path at Warwick was a lucky break. It was quite an unusual path. I was asked to set up a new academic unit. I guess it was being at the right place at the right time. I didn't have the expectation that I would become a professor. On becoming a professor, I suppose it is natural and it is part of a career pathway. In terms of becoming an academic, it is one way of seeing one's career develops in terms of moving from lecturer to senior lecturer, reader and then to professor. It is recognition of one's academic achievement. The other part is that alongside that recognition, one is taking more responsibilities within the university. A lot of activities might be within one's department or faculty or the university as a whole. So it is a measure of seniority, really, within the academic community that one is working within.

On recognition within communities of scholars: I suppose there are things that one has to personally manage. That is, in terms of being relatively opportunistic and open-minded in looking for opportunities. When one's research area gathers up or creates more momentum, your reputation naturally follows from there. You accumulate the interest and the capacity to drive research into the right direction. I think obviously it also has got to do with the turning points, in terms of getting a job, getting a grant, getting a publication, and using your hindsight and your intuition to choose the route.

What keeps me going is the hope that my research will continue to provide significant impact on the health services nationally and internationally. I think in the academic world that seems to be an important measure of your success, whether or not you have appreciation for doing good work and how your reputation goes. I realise that eventually I am driving myself into a university administrative role but I also need to look into my research interest. I believe that if you are gone too far towards the administrative route, you cannot really come back because you have lost your research reputation, and have more reputation in terms of being an administrator. I guess people who tend to succeed are going to be people who understand the wider system and how to play it to their advantage. You have to play within the rules if you are working in the university. This is because you can push the rules, you can stretch the rules, but you have to stay within the rules because otherwise, the organisation sooner or later will come down on you.



Figure 5: How I came to be where I am today:  
Analysis for Professor John Medicine



Key phrases:

“There were these elements of good luck and opportunities when I needed them. One has to personally be relatively opportunistic [having the right judgment] and open-minded in looking for opportunities.”

### **Commentary on Professor John Medicine**

Professor John Medicine was an undergraduate at Avon University. He did his General Practice (GP) training at Golden University Hospital. Upon completing the training, John became a lecturer in primary care at Royal Medical School. He also worked part-time at a local hospital. He headed a number of research projects and did some consultancy work. By that time, he was promoted to senior lectureship. He became more involved with developing and evaluating several medical services and training innovations in the UK. John left Royal Medical School and came to Warwick and headed a newly formed academic department. John's career story highlights some key social actors in his academic career. First, John's lecturer at Avon inspired him to combine theory and practice in his research area. Second, the other key social actors in John's career were his colleagues at Royal and Warwick, and his research networks who provided the support and resources for John to participate and contribute at various levels, nationally and internationally. John's biography depicts some key events in his career. His experience as an undergraduate at Avon University guided his interest towards his subject area, and the decision to become an academic. The early GP training experience at Golden University Hospital and the lecturing job at Royal Medical School provided John with valuable experience as researcher and academic. He developed a strong research culture at the department and successfully completed his part-time PhD programme, despite his busy schedule as an academic and a part-time general practitioner. John's move to Warwick was another key turning point in his academic career. The move provided more opportunities for him to develop his administrative skills alongside his academic and research competence.



#### 4.4.6 Professor Peter Science: Career story

I did my first degree at Port University. I got very excited with my subject area because the person whom I worked with for my undergraduate research project, was very enthusiastic and very dynamic. It was an interesting area. Then I did my PhD at Golden University. I started working at Golden College: getting a junior research fellowship there was quite significant and prestigious. Definitely moving to the US for my post-doctoral was one of the big things. I moved there to broaden my skills through the support of an international body. I learnt so much there as they do research in a different way. It opened my eyes to a broader and dynamic way.

I then came back to UK to join Warwick. I started the research group going; I got research grants. I pick research topics that are interesting to me. I think your research record is the most important thing. A little bit of luck is involved but you have to make your own luck by seeking opportunity. You've got to be selective in what you choose and you have to seek for opportunities. You've got to have good intuition as well. Initially, I did not get so many invitations but once you get the opportunity, you have to work very hard to be able to make quite a big impact. You can give papers to conferences. I did send a lot of papers to conferences in my early years. I guess what I also did was that I began by giving talks at other departments. I put much effort into my work. I did give talks through the persons who knew my work as a PhD student. The talks went down well and word spread around. Eventually, other people invite you to give more talks. I remember giving a talk at a workshop at Warwick and the Head of Department suggested that I give a talk to some French researchers. There was this joint venture workshop between the UK and the French researchers. There were quite a lot of influential French scholars who attended the talk. Eventually, they invited me to join an advisory committee for their laboratory. So, it is a case of starting small and making sure that everything that you do, you do it very well and build up gradually. By then, I had become a senior lecturer.

The department then advertised a job as professor here. I decided to apply and I then became a professor quite early. Now, as a professor, I don't have to apply to conferences because invitations come and then I can be a bit selective. When you start out you have a lot of time to do a good talk but now, as a professor, the amount of time I have is decreasing. You really have to plan so that you can produce good work. At Warwick, I did win significant prizes and awards in competitions. That can be considered significant as you've got to get recognition. At the same time you also got reports that say negative things. So you've got to have these positive reports to



balance your scholarly capabilities and your ideas. I thought of coming to Warwick for only a few years and then move somewhere else but that has not happened as the department has become stronger. It is worth being here. If I had not been promoted I would have gone somewhere else as I am quite ambitious. So, becoming a professor was not so much a matter of planning really. I just did good work that was recognised by my community of researchers and the university.

Networking can be important but basically you have to be seen as doing good work and having a good reputation. Network your work and find out about others' research. The main reason that I network is to discuss similar problems and issues: you've got to have real substance. Networking is very enjoyable. I realise that it is obviously important to know people in your community when it comes to getting people's help to write references for you. One doesn't work in isolation. Some people say your academic career depends on whom you work with. Well, my supervisor during my post-doc was one of the best scientists in the world: he had a name and that might have helped a bit but actually the reason for going to the US was because I was interested in his research topic rather than the person himself. So, as far as mentoring is concerned, I think I did it more myself. However, I got a little bit of help along the way with my PhD supervisor and later with my post-doc advisor. Even in my early career, I wrote my research grant applications and papers myself, but I believe that it is useful to get some help.

In becoming an academic, I believe you have to remain very optimistic and enthusiastic even when things are not going well. Sometimes your research doesn't work the way you wanted it to, and you have to try to see it through. Sometimes you may get frustrated with people but you have to keep the research and team going. That can be difficult as the funding is quite limited in time. You have to forget rejection when you get nasty comments and do another application. You've got to believe in the things that you are doing and be quite resilient. Remain positive when you're rejected and you've got to write many papers and applications. It is worth doing it if you enjoy it.

What keeps me going is that I like to think about ideas with young people. It is exciting to work with young people, get results and find something new. They can be very enthusiastic and it is nice to see them develop and move on. I would say that enthusiasm is the key. I think most professors would say that research would be the priority. Teaching and administration are also important but you've also got to know when to stop so that you have time for research. To teach is very important as it keeps you in touch with the basics and the young people in your class. All

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in all, it is basically putting in long hours to enable you to manage the three things efficiently well.

For me, becoming a professor means that you are being recognised through your achievement and your eminence in a certain field in terms of research. It is whether or not you have reached a certain level. So for me, becoming a professor means you've got to have and keep on reaching certain eminence and provide leadership in the field within and outside university. You organise conferences, chair advisory committees, chair research councils and participate in international societies. The professorship is not the end: it is the means to succeed. I think now I am becoming busier: I have many more projects, contacts and a lot more history that you build up over time. I sit on committees, lead research groups, teach and am also responsible for the students.

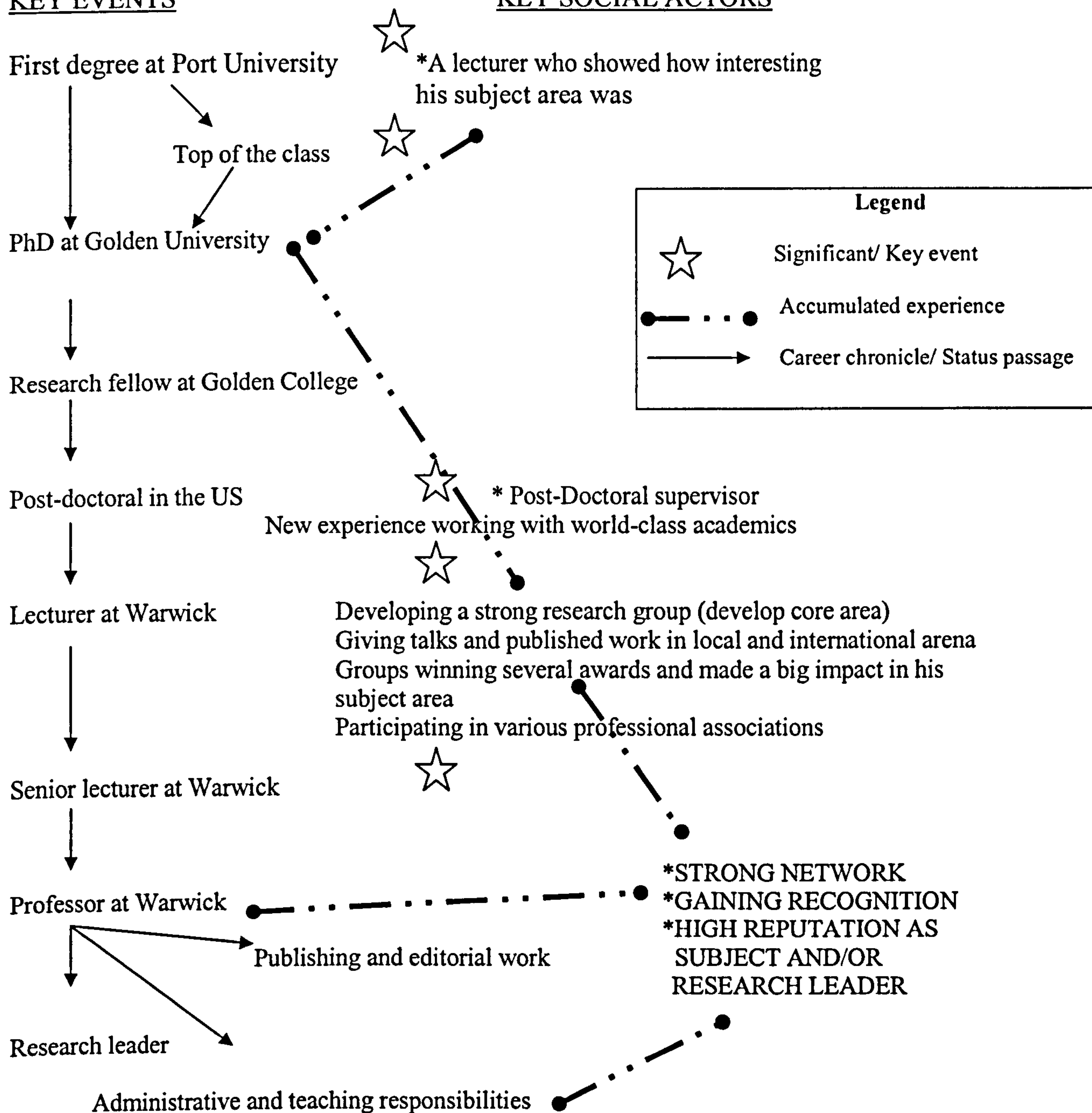
As an academic, you have to be very imaginative, be aware of new areas and come out with good ideas whether you are a professor or a lecturer. At the same time, be very realistic about asking and delivering ideas. Work hard, remain enthusiastic, seize opportunities as they come along, take advantage of the opportunities and do your work well in terms of research, writing, teaching and administration. Have good management and organisation skills. You've got to be selective to have good people in your research group. Identify research grants, interact with members well, deal with them quickly, resolve quickly, try to get people to help each other and create a good working environment. Understanding the organisational culture is very important in your career. You must know where you fit in the organisation. Overall, the most important thing is what you and your group are doing. To a certain extent some understanding between your department and the university is crucial. You've got to go your own way to be original but you have to fit in with various levels as well. It is easy to become a bit demoralised when criticism comes and you struggle a little bit. However, to succeed, you've got to remain optimistic and not too narrow-minded so that you are aware of new areas. You have to select the right areas, have good judgment and the right intuition on how things might turn out. Above all, enjoy what you do and keep the excitement going because if you lose the enjoyment, you won't gain success.



**Figure 6: How I came to be where I am today:  
Analysis for Professor Peter Science**

### KEY EVENTS

### KEY SOCIAL ACTORS



### Key phrases:

"I think your research record is the most important thing. A little bit of luck is involved but you have to make your own luck by seeking opportunity. Be selective in what you choose, having good intuition and working very hard to make quite a big impact. Basically you have to be seen doing good work and having a good reputation via networking your good work. Enthusiasm is the key: keep the excitement going because if you lose the enjoyment, you won't gain success."

## **Commentary on Professor Peter Science**

Professor Peter Science completed his first degree at Port University. Peter went to Golden University to do his PhD. Then, he started working as a research fellow at Golden College. Three years later, Peter left the college and went to the US for his post-doctoral research fellowship. A year later, he came back to the UK and secured a post as lecturer at Warwick University. Besides teaching and doing some administrative work, Peter developed a very strong research group at Warwick. His research group has since won several awards and prizes for producing a number of significant contributions to their field of study. Peter's career progressed from lecturer to senior lecturer and later as professor within six years of joining Warwick. Peter's narrative highlights some key social actors who were central to his academic career. They are his lecturer at Port University and his postdoctoral supervisor in the US. They provided the opportunity for Peter to develop an interest in his research area. The other key social actors in Peter's career were his colleagues at his department, in various committees and in communities of scholars who enabled Peter to participate and contribute at various levels, nationally and internationally. One of the key events in Peter's career was his experience working as a research fellow abroad. It transformed his approach towards research and teaching in his subject area. Since then, he has been linked to various academic networks both in and outside the UK. The decision to come to Warwick was another turning point in Peter's career. The move provided more opportunities for him to develop his research group and his academic discipline. Peter developed his ability to lead a successful research group that significantly had a big impact on his academic career. He established himself as a subject leader and gained recognition for his work.

#### 4.4.7 Professor Mark Science: Career story

When I was at Avon University I did not think that I was much cleverer than the other students. However, I wanted to do a PhD as soon as possible. I got my PhD in three years. I would not have survived without the encouragement of various people, namely my professors. The academics, especially my PhD supervisor at Avon, gave me various kinds of teaching and supervision. I was lucky that I knew them very well. They were the leading scholars in my field. With the advice of my PhD supervisor, I went to an international institution abroad to learn from some influential scholars in my subject area. I was very lucky that I was thrown immediately into this kind of academic environment. It was considered as the world's centre on my subject area. Retrospectively, I could see how events of good luck have assisted me in my academic development. After finishing my PhD, I did not have a job. However, I did not want to just hang around. So I went to Eastern Europe to know more about my subject area and its culture. At the same time, I applied for a job at 10 colleges in the UK. I got rejection letters from 8 of them; however, I got acceptance from 2. As one required me to go for an interview, I took the other one that offered me an unconditional place. I considered myself lucky because in those days [1960s], postdoctoral positions were very rare.

As far as significant events are concerned, I was very pleased to get that research fellowship at Avon College, which was much more than I expected when I was a schoolboy and an undergraduate. During my postdoctoral fellowship at Avon, I also took the chance to spend a few years as a visiting research fellow in Asia and Eastern Europe under the British Council exchange programme.

I then got a permanent post as a lecturer at Warwick. I was still very junior at that time. However, I was not promoted for a very long time. The department was lucky that I was patient and I stayed here. I started getting recognition really quite a long time after this. I did some good things on my own but I did not get credit for it. However I then rediscovered somebody else's work and I was getting credit for it. Partly, I was getting recognition for other people's work. So based on my experience, when you are young, you are always aware that other people are getting credit for your work. Then eventually there will come the breaking moment when people want to refer to you because it gives them credit.



Another significant event in my career also happened here at Warwick. I ran a conference when I was very young and not known at all. I invited nearly 200 world scientists to come to Warwick. That was a big privilege. It was so exciting and exactly the time when various important things in my research were taking place. I really started only a few years before that and these works started taking off from the conference. It became a major branch of science and a lot of people began to recognise my research area. Presently when I am going to give a lecture, I know that a lot of people will be coming to listen to me. I have this sort of confidence. When I get invited to a conference, I will talk about something that is still in conjecture. Seeing an idea of yours growing is just completely very satisfying. So, becoming a professor indeed involves some luck and some intuition.

In order to succeed in my subject area, I believe that I am supposed to set up a hypothesis and try to demolish it. By being sceptical about perceived wisdom in my subject area, I try to develop new theories. Sometimes, in the course of developing a new theory, you might find a lead to an old problem. You sort of pigeonhole all the existing knowledge into some places and you have to relate them to new problems.

As far as networking is concerned, I do not know whether networking is really the right word. When I started off, I was a student of a famous scientist and now I have had a very good student who is now a professor at Avon University. It is an individual thing. There are lots of things that really happen on a one-to-one basis. In fact, even networks involve a lot of one-to-one connections. I am involved in networking in a technical sense, especially in asking for grants to run conferences. We normally collaborate and we write a grant proposal that names some famous scientists and their famous research areas, and try to make it as impressive as possible. I know lots of Japanese, Russian and American scientists. Yes, sharing ideas is very important. There is a strong culture in our subject area. We can talk together and we know exactly what each other means. We are formed by the culture; we will be aware of new developments in our area. I do believe that our personality throughout our careers will be formed by the feedback of our colleagues. You have got to move around and spend your time abroad. I went abroad and I would meet a lot of scientists there. I would learn from them, collaborate and pick up something that would be very useful. At least, it might change my directions of study.

As far as mentoring is concerned, when I joined here, there was absolutely no mentoring. However, I definitely had academics whom I admired, people whose lecturing became some kind of a model which I tended to follow. Sometimes I do not follow when I want to do my own thing.

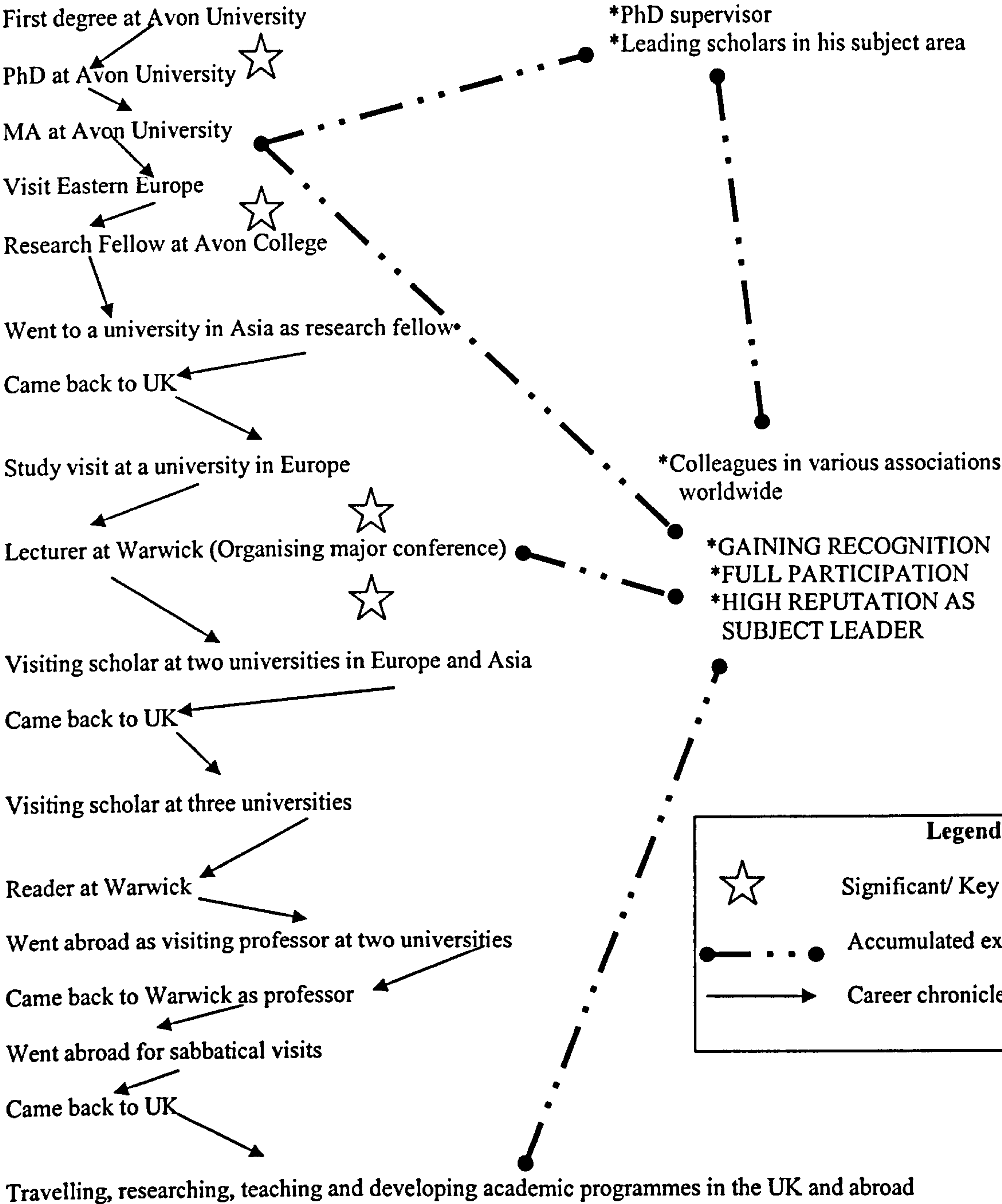
On becoming an academic, I think one has got to do good research and apply for jobs. One has got to send papers to journals that are ready to accept them. The young academic also needs to form his personality. You cannot take on other people's personality. You have to do it yourself. So I think that some kind of realistic assessment of what you are going to be able to do, for example in your teaching and research, is valuable. Initially, of course, at the beginning of your career, you are shaped by the society and the discipline. However, eventually you will form your own opinions and your own personality and take it on. I mean it is really like cross-cultural influence that is passed on. So I have the cultural influence of my professors at Avon and other scholars of some universities abroad, but eventually I will have strong opinions of my own. You cannot be a good student of these places unless you learn to do it yourself. If I just work as I was told to, I will be completely useless as a vector of these ideas. So I learnt to have strong opinions of my own and use other people's ideas to become an effective vector. At the beginning of your career, you think of yourself as a minor player and try to accommodate yourself to the system. In the course of time, you will observe this pattern. Eventually you start becoming aware of the routine policy and hold opinions that also consider the opinions of your colleagues. You will make deductions that these are the rules of the game and this is how to play. A scientist is a person who can solve problems, not the guy who can only read out other people's ways or solutions.

I do not think there is any difference between being a professor and a lecturer. However, inevitably some people's work will be leading the way, for example, in terms of research. Sometimes, if I think this is the way to go, quite a lot of people will listen. So I think I have this kind of leading function. I hope I can still solve some important problems before I retire. I continue travelling, researching, teaching and developing academic programmes in the UK and abroad. There are still some scientific questions and problems that I want to answer. In the course of the year, I will be in touch with a lot of students around the world. I do not expect that all of them will become major figures but a few of them will be though. So, it is very interesting to see and follow the careers of these young people.

**Figure 7: How I came to be where I am today:  
Analysis for Professor Mark Science**

**KEY EVENTS**

**KEY SOCIAL ACTORS**



**Key phrases:**

“At the beginning of your career, you are shaped by the society but eventually you will form your own opinions, your own personality and take it on. If I just work as I was told to, I will be completely useless as a vector. So I learn to have strong opinions of my own and use other people’s ideas to become an effective vector.”



### **Commentary on Professor Mark Science**

Professor Mark Science was an undergraduate at Avon University, one of the UK's 'elite' universities. He then pursued his PhD at the same university. During his PhD programme, he studied with two influential scholars in the UK and in France. After graduating, he did his masters degree and then took up his first job as a research fellow at a college in Avon. Mark frequently works abroad as part of improving himself as an academic. Interestingly, Warwick was the first institution that offered him a permanent post as lecturer. At Warwick, Mark's career progressed to reader and later as professor. The key social actors in Mark's academic career included his postgraduate supervisors and his colleagues at Warwick and in various professional associations. Mark's PhD supervisors have been very supportive throughout his career. They discussed each other's work and this early exposure to intellectual discourse had a big impact on Mark's career. Mark's networking with his colleagues and the 'invisible college' in his academic discipline enabled him to contribute and develop his academic identity. Mark's career story illustrates a number of key events in his academic life. His experience studying at Avon had a big impact on his academic development. The Avon experience taught Mark about the significance of working with colleagues abroad. He practises these academic visits throughout his career and they facilitate the direction for his academic work. Getting a permanent position at Warwick was another key turning point in Mark's career. At Warwick, he was given an opportunity to organise a conference which gathered around 200 scientists in his field of study. The conference provided an opportunity for him to network with his colleagues and to share his research area. Mark developed his reputation and since then, he has gained international recognition for his work.

#### 4.4.8 Professor Richard Science: Career story

I graduated from Northern Science University. I went to Border University for my PhD. After graduating, I spent 2 years working in the industry because I felt that it would be a useful experience. However, I liked the academic world in collaboration with industry. So, I returned to Border to take a short-term research job and eventually a permanent job as lecturer. Lecturing is interesting: I like research and teaching. My ambition evolved and took me from lecturer to senior lecturer. Then, a colleague suggested to me to become a reader and I took it as good advice. My head of department also gave me advice and encouraged me to think about my future. He was like a mentor for me to move further. Rules to progress are not very clear but senior positions mean more responsibility and his advice was most valuable. Fortunately I took his advice and began to develop more confidence in myself. Other than that, I motivated myself. I could have decided to stay on as reader at Border or move to another university to become a professor.

I took an appointment as a professor at Warwick. I moved from Border to Warwick because I liked the work environment here. The job gives me, as an academic cum inventor, the opportunities to collaborate with industry. I direct a number of university-industry spin-off companies. My research originally was visual. I shifted into a more specific area when I came to Warwick. I developed my own research group: I brought in new staff and experts and it became quite a big group. Besides Warwick, I also participate as a senior member of various professional associations and as a consultant to some companies outside the university.

I believe I was sculptured at the early stage and a sculptor in the mid- and late-career stages. My career evolves and develops gradually according to opportunities. You've got to watch your curriculum vitae. My responsibility now is to encourage people's careers to develop and reward themselves by their efforts. Undoubtedly Warwick strongly encourages academics to develop patenting. The Vice Chancellor encourages us to publish papers, get grants and then move towards patenting of inventions. Many prestige inventors patent things that are commercially viable and can be used as an academic output. It is collaboration between academic community and industry. You benefit twice because first you come out with great ideas, get it published, patent the ideas and soon it becomes an intellectual property. Both industry and academic community recognise this intellectual property. So, it benefits not only the individual inventor but also the university. Besides establishing the three areas namely teaching, research and

administration, Warwick is also keen to develop and generate intellectual property and commercialisation of research. I like that.

The great freedom in academic life as compared to industry is that you have the personal freedom to contribute. In terms of teaching and administration you might be expected to follow the rules but you tend to get more freedom in doing research. There is a lot of freedom in getting financial support. There are a lot of chances to get those experts to come and work with you. I like to have a team in my research project. In terms of achieving your career objectives by having good quantity and good quality research, I believe you need a research team to enable you to do so much work and progress in your projects. You need 4 to 6 research students to build up your portfolio. You have to develop good research teams. You cannot continue as if you are doing your PhD research. This is because you cannot spend too much time only on one research area. That is not the effective way to do research. Manage your research team to do research for and with you. Build a team and go for research volume. So in terms of scaling up your research you've got to have the ability to manage people and this requires carrying the managerial role of a team for say 1 to 5 years. You can work with senior members to bring funding. When you are known, break from the group, get funding for yourself and build up your curriculum vitae.

In achieving your career objectives, you also have to choose to do certain things like going to conferences, taking management roles, having charge of a particular subject area, joining professional societies, organising conferences, getting to know people and becoming known to people. You have your target and you have the rules to follow and the games to play. You look at the curriculum vitae and fill in the missing pieces. Basically it is not a formula, but I believe that in academic life, the rules are not too strict and regimented. You have the freedom to chart your career. You can use the rules in developing your career but part of an academic career is that you also have to be able to innovate and project that you are broad-minded. You might go and develop courses in other countries and that is when you step aside from the rules. In promotion, people see that you are not narrow-minded because as a professor, and even as an academic, you are expected to be a subject specialist and also broad-minded.

A professor is very focused on his or her objective. You profess your subject area. The volume of work and the level has to be sustained at a high level. People have to portray a certain academic level. As a professor, your thinking is more wide-ranging. Yet, it also depends on opportunity, good luck and good advice. There is no fixed blueprint. To become a professor you've got to



have certain skills and a certain amount of ambition to progress and to accelerate your career. As a professor you are expected to function as an all-rounder, and manage and lead your team and the discipline into a new area. To become a professor you have to be both incredibly ambitious and incredibly clever but at the same time you do need opportunities. Based on my experience, it is a bit difficult to become a professor if you concentrate on teaching a lot more and doing research less.

In my opinion, the rules to progress are not clear: the rules change as the working environment evolves and changes. Work your way through it. You've got to find out, absorb and adapt. I think adaptability is the most important thing to become a professor. I myself am a professor but I've got to adapt and change my research approach parallel to the needs of my field and other surroundings. You might still have certain things in common, but gradually it evolves and that is why it is interesting. You just have to find your own path.

As a professor you are expected to profess an area. In other words, you know about something. What I want to achieve as a professor is the continuation of recognition for my expertise and my work by my peers and colleagues around the world. I want to leave a kind of mark in my field of specialisation. It is one of the most valuable feelings to be able to contribute. I always see myself as an inventor. I put ideas in a different way and I like to maintain the respect of my peers in my work. In other words, being valued and appreciated for your invention. I like to produce things which people have not thought of before and I believe it is the novelty and the newness that gives you the satisfaction. In my case, I have to work a balance between my research and my invention so that both aspects help each other.

As a researcher and inventor you've got to become a lateral thinker because it is rather dangerous: you are dealing with your reputation. As an inventor, with little knowledge in that area, your movement is like that of a foolhardy person. You have to accept criticism. In fact, sometimes you are trying not to be laughed at by your peers for your invention. You have to be a bit careful: you do not want to be laughed at. Your progress is not so much by following what others are doing: people who invent have got to be brave and foolhardy. An inventor does not always follow the rules. An invention is successful when it works in a way that people have not thought of before. It is a challenge and that is my situation of being an inventor and a professor. If my invention makes money, then that becomes an advantage!

Figure 8: How I came to be where I am today:  
Analysis for Professor Richard Science

KEY EVENTS

First degree at Northern Science University

↓  
PhD at Border University

↓  
Working in industry

↓  
Back to Border University as researcher

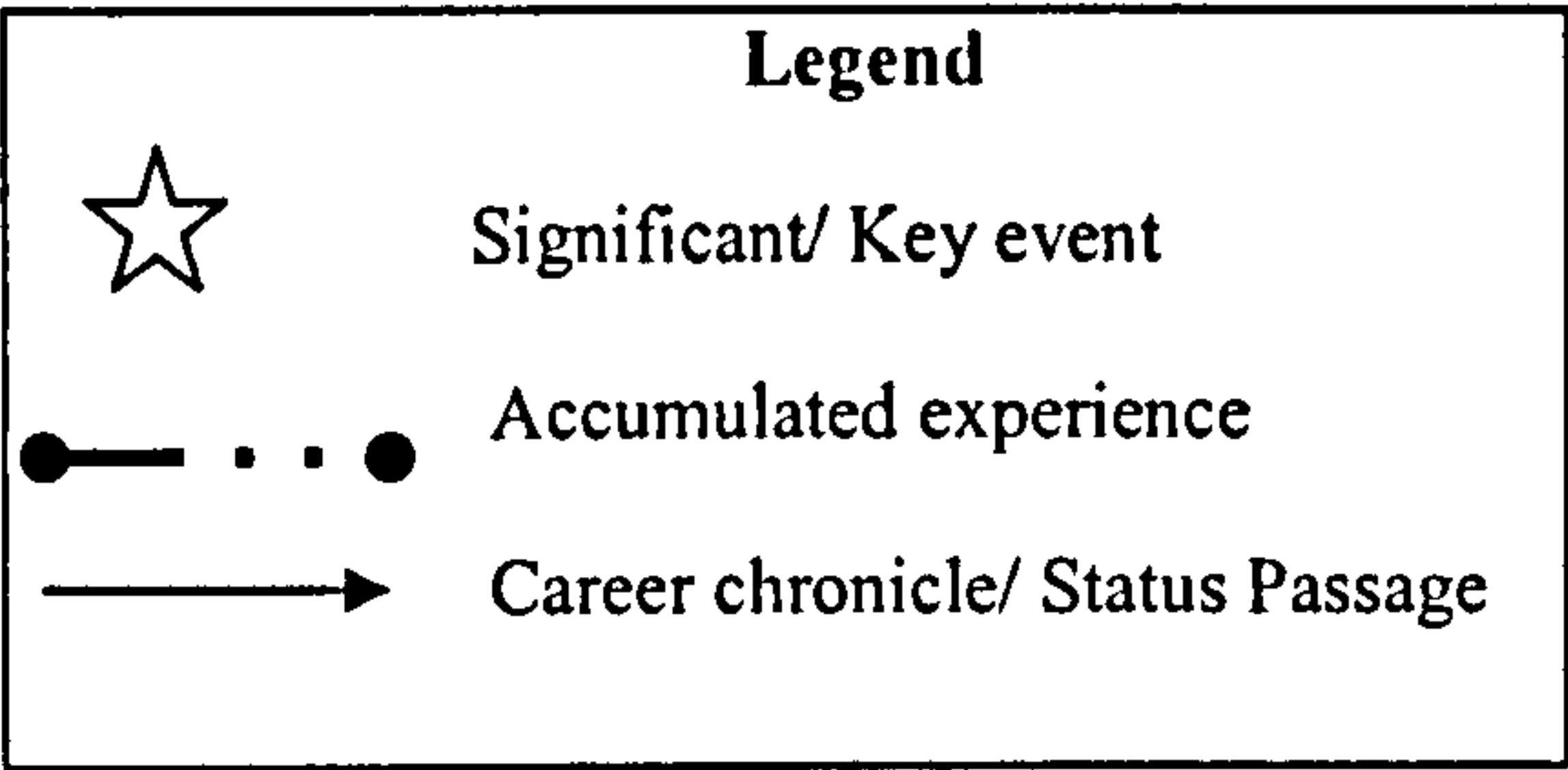
↓  
Lecturer at Border University

↓  
Senior lecturer at Border University

↓  
Reader at Border University

↓  
Professor at Warwick

Administrative Responsibilities



KEY SOCIAL ACTORS

\* A Senior colleague and the Head of Department at Border University

Combining academic work with industrial experience (core area)  
Getting involved in various professional associations  
Developing a strong research group  
Active in consultancy work and university-industry companies (patenting)  
Active at international / national conferences

\* Vice Chancellor at Warwick

Teaching and research

\*GAINING RECOGNITION  
\*FULL PARTICIPATION  
\*HIGH REPUTATION AS  
SUBJECT LEADER AND  
ADMINISTRATOR/ACADEMIC MANAGER

Key phrases:

“You have to be incredibly ambitious. It depends on opportunity, good luck and good advice. The rules [in academia] change as the working environment evolves and changes. So you have got to find out, absorb and adapt. Adaptability is the most important thing. You just have to find your own path. What I want to achieve is the continuation of recognition for my expertise by my peers.”

### **Commentary on Professor Richard Science**

Professor Richard Science did his first degree at Northern Science University. Then he went to do his PhD at Border University. He worked in industry for 2 years and soon found that his strong interest was in academic work. He took a short-term research job at Border University and eventually secured a job as lecturer. He developed his research group at Border. Richard's career progressed from being a lecturer to senior lecturer and later reader after 18 years working at Border. With the dream of pursuing his interest as an inventor, combining academic work with industry, Richard moved to Warwick to take up a professorial chair in his subject area. He continued developing his research group at Warwick. Besides doing his academic work, Richard also directs two spin-off companies at the university research centre. A number of key social actors were highlighted in Richard's career story. His senior colleagues at Border had been very supportive and their encouragement had a big impact on Richard's career. Another key social actor that was central to his academic career was the vice chancellor at Warwick. The Vice Chancellor encouraged Richard to develop and shape his research group using his previous experience at Border. Richard's biography indicated a number of key events in his career. His experience working in industry formed a strong foundation for research and teaching in his subject area. Working with experienced colleagues at Border inspired Richard to think about developing his career from a lecturer to a more senior position. Consequently, moving to Warwick provided more opportunities for him to develop his career as an academic researcher, subject leader and inventor. The 'Warwick Way', which encourages a close working relationship between university and industry, suited Richard's research interests and this supportive work environment accelerated his academic career.



#### 4.4.9 Professor Mary Social: Career story

I thought of becoming an academic on my first week as an undergraduate at Tower University, I never had a second thought about it. I fell in love with and studied my subject properly. I knew then that this was it. There was no doubt, no hesitation and no reservation. There was an option to do an MA but it was not obligatory. So I skipped the MA and moved straight to do my PhD. I tried to get it done as fast as possible. My real motivation was my enduring fascination with the philosophy of social science, the nature of social reality. That has been the problem that has preoccupied me for my entire career. I am still searching for the answer, undoubtedly.

It is undeniable that having friends is important. When I was at Tower University, there was this professor named Teddy. He helped me a great deal, not so much in mentoring but we did become good friends. When he died he said that he wanted his service to be conducted by his three best students of which I was one: I felt honoured by this. He was a very special man. He didn't play up being a professor. He would go and talk to a stranger and then everyone else would come and the stranger would feel welcome by this process. I guess that was networking in his way.

Getting a job at Southern University was perfectly simple: I had a job at Avon College at the time. I applied to an open advertisement. It was at the time of finishing my PhD. I applied for 3 jobs. Southern was the first to call for an interview. They offered me the job on the spot and I accepted it on the spot. I was at Southern for 7 years. We had a strange Head of Department. We were not given any postgraduate teaching and supervision. I disagreed and I went to talk about the prospect of promotion. I suppose that it was not rudely done but I guess it was rather impolite at the time. This Head of Department answered, "If you want it, go get it somewhere else". He said the same to the others and we all left!

I came to Warwick in 1973 after I just got married. Instead of moving house here, I commuted and I was thinking that I would do this for a few years and then I'd move to another university closer to my home. Then the children came along. Then they were at primary schools and time passed on. At the same time, Warwick became better and better. When the children were already 15 and 16, I started asking myself whether I should move to another university. I already knew the place; Warwick treated me well. It is a nice working environment. Why go somewhere else? So I stayed at Warwick.

Besides being a good friend and mentor, Teddy was also the president of an international professional association in my subject area and he asked me to become the editor of its journal. That was a major introduction to the intellectual community. It was an old and traditional way of networking. It was very informally done in the pre-computer world. We wrote the journal on a manual typewriter and we regarded ourselves as friends. As an editor, I attended the association meetings and I met other scholars. I am still involved in it now. I have gone through all stages; editing, administrative committee and eventually president of the association. It was a good introduction. It opens you up to others. I gave talks in other countries. I got the chance to work internationally and I felt welcome because I love multilingual interaction and I love languages.

So, I think my work with Teddy and my colleagues in the association and my discussion with the Head of the Department at Southern were the significant events in my career. For me, the Head of Department was rather authoritarian and not rational. He didn't want anybody else except himself to supervise the postgraduate students. I got to a difficult position: I was not trying to claw for power. We were all specialists and the way he behaved was ridiculous. It had done nothing good for the postgraduate students. That was why I went to talk to him.

I developed my career through finding a big problem that intrigued me, in which I thought I could contribute something original. I feel sad for those people who never get to identify their question. Set a big question that keeps you going. I believe I am a sculptor of my own career. I make the role. Every book I write ends with a problem for the next book: It is an autonomous kind of activity. I much prefer academics who are active agents. They can ask themselves what is important and then act in a way they think best. I prefer the innovative actor. Academia is about being innovative and productive.

In an academic career, we have the general rules and regulations. We have players and commentators. I always see myself as a player. I am not into 'state of the art' presentation. I refused to join the bandwagon, interested in the trend and development, and try to say something about it. Commentary is essential. You want to discuss the ideas, to criticise them outright. Mentally, I am a rather brutal critic. I relate myself to others. You have to do that to a certain extent. We also have to contribute to the shape of the culture. I am looking at the human as an active ideational agent. There is a major distinction between a commentator and a player. A commentator is always shaped by the discipline: producing endless books that are not original and giving views based on others' argument. Players do work that is interesting, novel, different

and is an original contribution. You've got to be a player and be proactive. You are your own life project because, otherwise, you treat yourself as a puppet of the social forces.

In understanding organisational culture in my career, I believe that it is not an object outside. We make the culture. You get to know the scene. You are a player. You bring in your culture. It is up to you to make your role, not merely taking the role. I always see myself as an explorer in my career. Retrospectively yes, my academic career may sound linear. However, there is no grand design. It was not designed. Everything was not scripted. When we meet other academics at conference, in conversation and in some other development, things will happen in an incidental manner. So, I would like to use the concept of academics engaged in role-playing. If not, academics would be robots. I look at an academic as investing in and personifying several roles. Becoming a professor or an academic is not to sculpt a reputation. I don't care what other people think of me. I give a talk because I love it, not to become better known. It would have to be the invisible college and the journals that I aim my talk to, rather than to please the people. Life is too short for that. I am doing this job for the love of it. I am not doing it for somebody else and I am not longing for the clapping of hands!

On becoming a reader and eventually a professor here at Warwick, I think there is no difference from becoming an academic. It is very much the same with one exception. Being a professor means you have to show leadership. You are placed on important committees. That is the only major difference. Being in any promoted post, for example as head of the department, means administration work is wall-to-wall. You want to make it the best department. So, it is pay-back time. Somebody has got to do it. Do it well and try to help the department to achieve a national reputation. I have been teaching and writing for the unsolved problem. It is ongoing and it is very enjoyable. It is not forcing you. You do it for the love of it. Enjoy doing that. Don't stop just because you have been promoted. The title is secondary. Don't try to become a professor. It will come quickly, but not because you are aiming for it. You have to be in love with what you are doing. For me, the professorship is not the ultimate goal. Find your academic passion and work for it. It is about perseverance. It is not about becoming a professor or a vice chancellor. The things that keep me going are the ideas. If they run dry, I will take retirement. So, what I want to achieve is that in the end, these will be written on my tomb: 'Professor Mary Social cracked the problem in social studies'. I am going to contribute until my death. I won't stop. Different people handle it differently. For me, I will be working until they lay me down in my coffin. I will never stop contributing.



**Figure 9: How I came to be where I am today:  
Analysis for Professor Mary Social**

KEY EVENTS

First degree at Tower University

PhD at Tower University and teaching at Avon College

Left Avon College and taught at Tower University

Lecturer at Southern University → publication

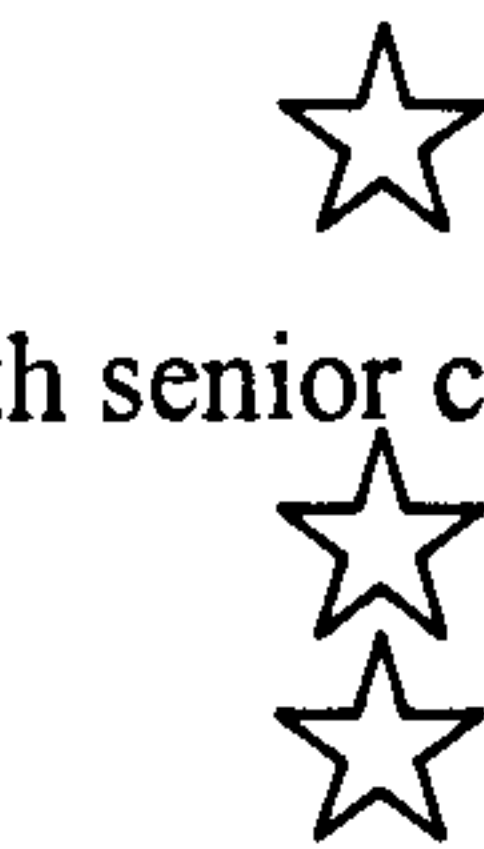
Discussion with senior colleague  
on her future

Reader at Warwick

Professor at Warwick

Administrative duties

Continuous publication  
(Books and articles)



Involvement in professional associations  
Secretary for influential association  
Editor for international journal  
Becoming a central figure for various associations  
Developing her core area in the discipline



Research leader

Teaching

KEY SOCIAL ACTORS

\*A professor who became  
a senior colleague

**Legend**



Significant/ Key event



Accumulated experience



Career chronicle/ Status passage

\*GAINING RECOGNITION  
\*FULL PARTICIPATION  
\*HIGH REPUTATION AS  
SUBJECT LEADER

Key phrases:

“Find a problem that intrigues you in which you can contribute something original. Set a big question that keeps you going. There is a major distinction between a commentator and a player. A commentator is always shaped by the discipline. Players do work that is novel, different and original. You have got to be a player and be proactive. You are your own life project because otherwise, you treat yourself a puppet of the social forces.”

### **Commentary on Professor Mary Social**

Professor Mary Social did her undergraduate and postgraduate studies at Tower University. Her love for her subject area inspired her to become an academic. She made the decision during her first year as an undergraduate. She did a PhD shortly after getting her first degree. While doing her PhD, Mary also taught at Avon College. After two years, she left the college and became a tutor at Tower University. When she was nearly finishing her PhD, Mary got a lecturing job at Southern University. After seven years working at Southern University, Mary moved to Warwick to take a post as reader. Six years after joining Warwick, Mary was promoted as a full professor. Mary's narrative includes some key people in her academic career. Mary's husband, who used to be an academic and is now a writer, had been very supportive throughout her career. Professor Teddy was also central to Mary's academic career. Teddy provided the opportunity for Mary to develop her career as a postgraduate student, a colleague and eventually a successful and influential academic in her subject area. The other key social actors in Mary's career were her colleagues at her department and in various professional communities, and the 'invisible college' in her discipline. A number of key events make up Mary's career story. Mary's early experience working with Teddy as a student and a member of a professional association enabled her to contribute at a wider scale and eventually became an international figure in her field of study. Her disagreement with her head of department at Southern became a critical point in shaping her future career. This event inspired her to move to Warwick. Working at Warwick provides more opportunities for Mary to develop her academic discipline and her career as a successful university teacher, researcher and administrator.

#### 4.4.10 Professor Katherine Social: Career story

I studied at Golden University for 4 years doing my undergraduate and MA. I worked with Professor Hunt, a very well known social scientist for my MA. After finishing my course, I was looking around for a job. I thought that it would be nice to stay in an academic career because I liked working at the university. I decided not to do a PhD. Instead I decided to move directly into becoming a contract researcher. I joined a research group at Northern City University Business School and worked with Professor Thomas Brown who was keen on qualitative case study research. He was a very good mentor. At Northern, I also worked with Professor Helen Robert. Looking back, I think I made the right and important choice to do research early and to work with these two prominent people in the area rather than to stay at Golden and do my PhD. I was lucky to start working at one of the early business schools in the UK. My two research mentors developed some new areas in the field of business and management. In a way, it gave me a head start in a new institution with these well-known scholars in the field. They were very helpful in developing my career, putting me in touch with people from various top business schools. One of the significant events in my career was that Helen got some money to start on a new research area and at the time I was one of her young research assistants. At that time, this research area was considered new to the field. Eventually the research area ‘exploded’ and became one of the important foci in my discipline. I was at the right place and the right time! Being in the area, I could write quickly. Through the help of my mentors, I began to write books and articles in that particular area and I eventually became one of the subject area’s influential figures. I was getting known quickly as one of the early scholars in the subject area because there were not many business schools in the UK at that time. That has been my area ever since. After that, I published so rapidly and quite a lot that I did not have to do my doctorate. People already knew my work in the research area and that really helped. Northern was also significant as I met my husband there. We did some work together. I did well as a researcher at Northern but as my husband got a new post at Eastern University, we then moved there.

I started lecturing at Eastern; my husband and I continued doing research together. After my contract expired, I began looking for a job and got one at Regal University College. I was at Regal for 11 years. My husband at that time got a post at a university not far from mine. When I was at Regal, I began to develop more confidence in my teaching. My years at Regal also gave me interesting colleagues with whom I could network throughout my career. They are all big names in my field now. I published more books and articles in my subject area. By the time I got



my senior lectureship and eventually readership at Regal, my husband and I decided that we wanted to spend our retirement somewhere near Scotland. I did particularly want to find a job somewhere near the Scottish border. Luckily a full professorship was advertised at Water University. When I applied for the professorial post at Water, I was already an editor for a number of journals in my field. I had also done some external examining at Water and therefore they already knew me as a scholar. As my work was based on the critical questioning approach, it suited Water's way of running its business school. I got the post. I believe my appointment there was very important because I managed to continue developing this critical questioning approach with Water Business School. I probably wrote my most famous and significant book there. I began to develop my skills in administration and curriculum building at Water. Sadly, my husband died during my years at Water. We therefore did not have our retirement as planned. I stayed at Water for 9 years before coming to Warwick. Through networking, I got to know someone at Warwick who was keen that I joined the university. In terms of coming to Warwick, I believe that it was a job decision. I continued with my research, administration and mentoring my junior colleagues here. A lot of what I do now is chairing a number of committees to maintain the quality and the standard of our teaching and research. It is about developing the institution.

I guess I learnt a lot when I moved from one university to the other. Each has its own unique culture and people. You always come with a reputation and I learnt how to do things in the new place. It is important to fit in the workplace as each place has its own system. It is very important indeed to learn about your new colleagues, the work culture and the quality standard of the university. You have to understand the organisational culture in order to fit in with the people that are doing the work. What I did was to be flexible. Interaction with colleagues is important because it helps in exchanging ideas. I got invited through good references. Get your work recognised and you will gradually be invited into the communities of practice. You need to publish so that your work can be recognised as important and significant. By that time, you then get invited to join the editorial boards and to do external examinations. You then network with people in that area through presenting papers at conferences. You can also organise your own conferences and build your presence in a particular area so people will know that 'so and so' is in the field of 'so and so', and that is when you get noticed. It is through people's knowledge about your research that you become known at a broader international community and get invited to do things. The key thing is that you must be in an area that is interesting and developing.

I also believe that mentoring and networking are two important things that are actually crucial to career development in academia. I got mentored in my early career, through working with Thomas and Helen, and now it is my turn to mentor the younger colleagues in charting out their careers. In a way, taking the roles that other people played for you before. Some of my students and PhD candidates, whom I examined, are now colleagues and professors at other universities. These are examples of mentoring, sponsorship and networking.

However, as far as mentoring is concerned, I believe that I should not become too dependent on my sponsors. You need that in the early stage but you should learn to stand on your own and develop your research identity. You should be managing your own career. You don't want to become over-dependent and associated too much with your sponsors until you can't stand on your own feet. As you develop, you need to establish your own identity and that is quite important. I worked with Thomas and Helen but then gradually I developed my research, generated my own work and in a way, became someone in my own right. All academics put forward a sort of identity but reputation is about what others see in you. So it is how people respond to the identity that you are showing them. So, a lot of my identity is about the work that I do.

On becoming a professor, I think one should be a leader in one's subject, sorting out administrative jobs, writing work that has a big impact and getting research grants to develop your research area to inform your teaching. You should also build the institution that you are working in through mentoring junior colleagues and building up research teams. I believe the key thing is to stay as a prestigious scholar by doing research, as it is the way of maintaining recognition within one's own field. What I want to achieve in my career is that I want my work to be recognised and I want them to shape the discipline. I will continue doing good teaching and sponsoring students. I also hope that I can continue writing some work that can convince others. I hope that people that I respect, especially my colleagues, would say that my work is good, that is all.

Figure 10: How I came to be where I am today:  
Analysis for Professor Katherine Social

KEY EVENTS

First degree at Golden University



MA at Golden University



Researcher at Northern City University



Lecturer at Eastern University

Teaching  
Sustaining her  
research area



Lecturer at Regal University

Teaching,  
Administration, research and networking



Professor at Water University

Continuous involvement in professional associations  
Editor for journals  
Becoming a central figure in the discipline  
Sustaining her core area in the discipline  
Her husband died



Professor at Warwick

Research leader

Teaching

Mentoring younger colleague

Administrative duties



KEY SOCIAL ACTORS

\*2 professors/research  
group leaders

\*Her husband

Legend

Significant/ Key event

Accumulated experience

Career chronicle/ Status passage

\*STRONG NETWORK  
\*GAINING RECOGNITION  
\*FULL PARTICIPATION  
\*HIGH REPUTATION  
AS SUBJECT LEADER AND  
ADMINISTRATOR/  
ACADEMIC MANAGER

Key phrases:

“You have to understand the organisational culture to fit in...Mentoring and networking are two important things that are actually crucial to career development in academia. I got mentored in my early career...and now it is my turn to mentor the younger colleagues... taking the roles that other people played for you before. You need that (mentor) in the early stage but you should learn to stand on your own and develop your research identity...you don’t want to become over-dependent and associated too much with your sponsors until you can’t stand on your own feet.”



### **Commentary on Professor Katherine Social**

Professor Katherine Social did her undergraduate and Master of Arts studies at Golden University. Then, Katherine became a researcher and went to work with Professor Thomas Brown and Professor Helen Robert at Northern City University. She married a lecturer in the same department and then moved to Eastern University. Two years later, they moved to London and she took a lecturing job at Regal University. After 11 years at Regal, they decided to settle down near the Scotland border. She then moved to become a professor at Water University, close to their new house. While at Water, Katherine's husband died and this brought some changes to their retirement plan. She secured a professorial chair at Warwick. At Warwick, her academic career flourished, involving more administrative work, mentoring junior colleagues and developing a number of research groups. Katherine's narrative highlights some key social actors in her academic career. Thomas and Helen provided the opportunity for her to develop her research skills. Katherine's late husband had also been very supportive throughout her career. The other key social actors that were central to Katherine's academic career are her colleagues in various academic networks both in and outside the UK. They provided the support and resources for Katherine to participate and contribute at various levels, nationally and internationally. A number of key events are evident in Katherine's career story. Her experience at Northern City University transformed her approach towards research in her subject area. She was lucky that the research area identified by Professor Helen's group was considered as new in the UK at that time. Katherine eventually became a key figure in that particular research area. Moving around various institutions in the UK provided more opportunities for Katherine to develop her career as a successful academic.

#### 4.4.11 Professor Alan Social: Career Story

[Alan did his first degree at Scotch University and his Masters degree at Scotch City University. A year later, he went to Golden University to do his PhD and got a job as lecturer at Bronze College in England].

My first PhD supervisor did not like my work. I had to get used to that. However, my other PhD supervisor, who hardly ever read my work, encouraged me to send my papers to journals. That was good of him. I wrote the early draft of my PhD chapters and sent it to journals. It was accepted, published and became quite famous in its way. At that time I was in the middle of my PhD. Besides doing that, I also sent my paper to some prominent people around the world. I sent one to a scholar who eventually got a Nobel Prize. He sent me a letter back saying what he liked and did not like about my work. I was stunned by that. I was just 25 and I hadn't got my PhD at that time. I sent another copy of my work to another very famous scholar who also won a Nobel Prize and he also sent me a letter telling me what he liked about my work. I was amazed by these events. These people were like gods to me! I got an affirmation out of that: I knew what I was talking about after all. I discovered that there was this exciting intellectual community of scholars around the world. I felt invited into the community, I felt valued and that was very important to me. I did not get a lot of affirmation about my work from my first PhD supervisor. I guess that was because I was quite stubborn as a student. Despite a bunch of lecturers telling me that I should not work on one area, I moved on. I believe that if you want to be influential in the world of academia, you have to be prepared to accept a lot of criticism. You have to threaten and upset the people who came before if you are going to build a new structure. You have to be bold and that has always been my philosophy. Becoming an academic is not equal to being a cricketer or a soccer player. You score not as often, but you have to score a very good goal so that it gives impact. That is all that matters. Besides that, I also prefer to work on topics that not many people are doing. I don't like to follow other people. You do get useful criticism, you bend and you have to accept it. So, write papers and research findings that are influential and give a big impact.

I began my teaching at Bronze in very small groups. I developed what you might call Socratic teaching. It means just questions and answers. That stayed with me throughout my whole life. Even when I give research talks and lectures, I will stop and ask for questions or I ask questions. I like a seminar where everybody speaks. Usually they remember much more, they learn more and they enjoy it much more.



I planned some aspects of my career. Eventually, I thought that it would be important to go to America when I was young. It was important to build my stock of knowledge; It was good for my curriculum vitae. I thought that I would learn more. When I went to the US, I was in my late 20s. I met some very good scholars. I discovered that they have different ways of doing their subjects. They valued different things and that was very challenging and good for me. If you move, you will blossom: that is my judgment. It gave me an insight to a new way of thinking. I realised that I was very amateurish before this. I did explore a lot. I went to the US quite a narrow kind of person and came back a broader kind of person with much more confidence. I went to two US universities to give talks. It was very frightening to go to these famous universities and give my first few research talks but it was an interesting experience. It was good for a young scholar like me to do things that were frightening. I was driven to succeed. It was such a very good experience.

I never had a mentor: I was like on my own. But I got kind acts from people like the famous scholars who wrote to me from the other side of the world. I had one nice supervisor who did not do much work but was kind to me, and encouraged me in that sense. So I see that everybody needs some help in that way. I believe, judging by my life, that it is a mistake to expect other people to help you academically much. I think a lot of young researchers and scholars think that famous professors became famous because somebody helped them when they were young. That is not true in general. I learnt from nasty journal referee reports. I can think of 200 journal rejections. Don't look at the rejection. Bounce back. This rejection is normal in academia. The ability to bounce back is very important. You have to be able to take bad outcomes. There were many times when I thought that this was really hurting me. As a young researcher, you do not realise that some people might be hostile to you and to your work. Some of my articles were rejected and marked as bad. People sometimes say horrible things to you. That is just the way the world is: you are dealing with humans. People have emotions. If you are doing something different which gives a big impact, it is an important piece of work. Some people don't like you because you are inevitably threatening their work. And now being a 50-year old academic, I feel that I am being threatened by the new generation, the young ones, and I feel fine. I try to be nice in my referee's report. That is fine and normal in academia.

I came back to the UK and then became a full professor here at Warwick. I was a full professor in my previous post in the US. As a professor, I think it is important to be nice to young people. I do



some mentoring. Mainly now, it is to my PhD students and my young faculty members. I am also involved on the edges of both university and departmental policies. I tend to be more focused on the university level than the departmental level. However, as a professor, I still believe that it is important to keep on doing good research. I also have my own way of linking to the community, like talking to journalists even though my colleagues think that it is a bad idea. I started talking to journalists and look at it as an investment. I build up and develop my network. Relationships are quite important in the media. If you are nice to reporters, they will remember you. They will come to you more and more. I am okay doing that sort of networking. However, I still think networking for your papers is more important than networking as a person. Some people operate in different ways. Some people are very strong net-workers as individuals. I am a bit maverick in that way.

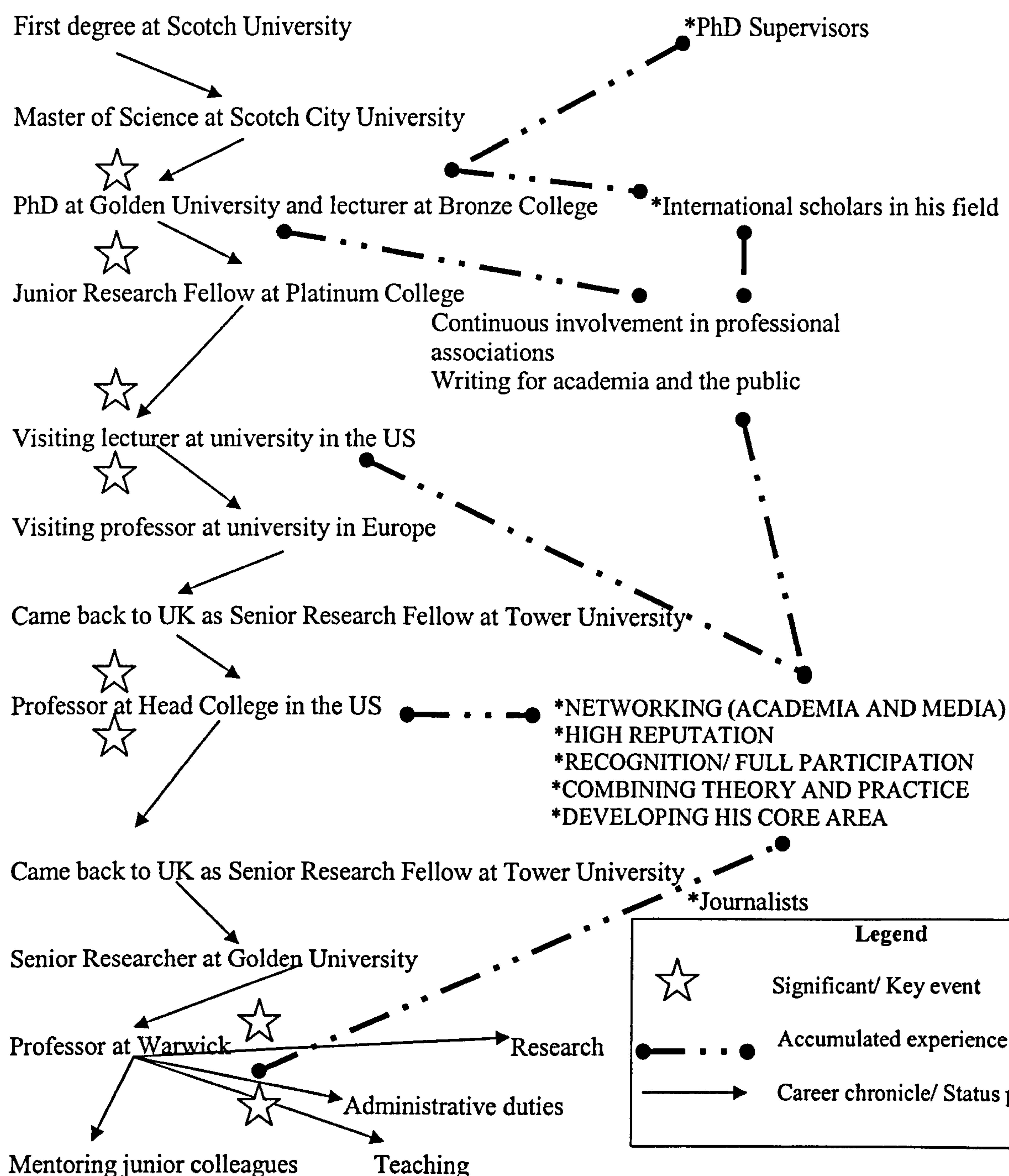
I believe most professors did not plan to become a professor. We are just doing our work. I just went with the flow. However, I thought yes, I had a strong need to get to the top. I was very competitive and very driven to get to the top. I was almost certainly competing with my father. I was very ambitious. I chose a lot of that. I was very focused and determined in that way. I do plan a lot. I have done enough and I am willing to be criticised. Over a number of years, I have created a few anchor areas. I am happy with what I have contributed here and throughout the world. I have never been a follower. I wanted to have some original ideas, to leave my mark on the world and to leave an intellectual legacy, something creative. You have to become known as a person who pushes the thought.

I don't think that I am being moulded very much by the structure of the organisation. Of course I have to work within the framework. I have to publish papers in certain journals. I could not change the rules but I have to work within the rules. However, the rules are not so binding and there is a fair bit of flexibility so that you can build your career in different ways. We all have to work within the rules for promotion and academic success. At the end of the day, you must be seen to do good work. Stay unconventional but publish in conventional journals within the broad rule of academia. Come out with your ideas. You can even publish unconventionally but in general, this is disastrous to your career. If you are productive and you are a good worker, you are your own insurance. Accept a lot of criticism and be tenacious. That has been my experience.

**Figure 11: How I came to be where I am today:  
Analysis for Professor Alan Social**

### KEY EVENTS

### KEY SOCIAL ACTORS



### Key phrases:

"If you want to be influential in the world of academia, you have to be prepared to accept a lot of criticism... If you move, you will blossom... Choose topics that [not many] people are working on and develop a new structure."



### **Commentary on Professor Alan Social**

Professor Alan Social did his first degree at Scotch University. Soon after he graduated, he went to Scotch City University to do his Master of Science. A year later, he went to Golden University to do his PhD and also got a job as a lecturer at Bronze College. After graduating with a PhD, he moved to Platinum College to become a Junior Research Fellow. Alan later went abroad to become a visiting lecturer at two prestigious universities in America and Sweden. Then he came back to Tower University in the UK to take up a post as Senior Research Fellow. He left for the US again to take up a professorial chair at Head College. Two years later, he came back to Tower University in London as a Senior Research Fellow. At the same time he became an associate member of a research institute in Golden University before joining Warwick as a professor. Alan's narrative highlights some key social actors in his academic career. Alan was lucky that both his PhD supervisors were critical and supportive of his PhD work. The other key social actors in Alan's career were his colleagues worldwide. His interactions with colleagues, in various committees and communities of scholars provided a source for Alan to develop his academic career. Alan's biography illustrates some turning points and transformation. Despite an early disagreement with his major PhD supervisor who did not like the focus of his PhD research, Alan gained self-confidence through the encouragement of his second supervisor. The encouragement that Alan got from two Nobel Prize winners inspired him to learn more from his international colleagues. His experience working at various universities and research institutes in the UK and abroad enabled him to expand his network, contribute on a wider scale and establish himself as a key figure in his field of study.



#### 4.4.12 Professor Derek Social: Career story

I did my undergraduate degree at Central Tower University. I then took a postgraduate teaching certificate course and started my teaching career at a teacher training college. There was a big demand for teachers in the late 1950s and mid 1960s. There was an expansion in the need for teacher training and teacher education. There was a need for teachers and lecturers in my subject area. While teaching at the college, I did my Masters Degree at River University. One of my primary concerns as a teacher trainer at that time was that my colleagues and I should teach what we really knew based on our experience of the subject area. That was the reason why I believed that my research area should feed into my teaching. At that time I was interested to do research in an area that was previously considered trivial. I did not change my research area because of my interest in it. I spent 6 years working at the college. I then joined Art University as a lecturer. I got my first lectureship when I was in my late 20s. I found myself doing two things when I started: I was helping students preparing to teach in schools and I was also doing some research in my subject area.

In the 1980s and 1990s, there was a redefining of social science perspectives and greater emphasis was given to practice and pragmatism. That reflected the movement in my subject area. And so it happened that I was working in an area where there was an expansion. Furthermore, there were very few researchers in my area. It was still seen to be quite low-status, a 'backwater' of research. So I was not very trendy. It was not as trendy as looking at crime, gender, feminism and sexuality. These are the kinds of research that attracted people. Ironically, there were some government reforms and the focus eventually moved into my research area. Opportunities for attracting grants came. Publishers were looking for this kind of work. So from being a backwater, people started to have an interest in my research area. And it did attract a new generation of researchers to be interested in that field. Social science researchers tended to change their thoughts and there were different types of social science research that looked at my subject area from multidisciplinary perspectives. So in some way, this paradoxically tended to open up an interest in my subject area as the government at that time was interested in it. So anybody working in that field had the opportunity. My research area came to the limelight. I began getting research grants, which later contributed to a lot of publications. A lot of opportunities emerged. This eventually accelerated my academic career. I published more books, papers and brought in research grants. I was active in becoming a research grant winner and developed a number of

strong research networks within and outside my university. I became involved in various research networks with a range of other people researching in this field. I had some very good colleagues and we were quite widely networked across the country and abroad. This was done through attending conferences, participating in associations, writing and editing for journals. So, there was always live discussion and debate about researching in our area.

Another significant event was about promotion. It used to be difficult to get promoted from a lecturer to senior lecturer at universities in those days. So I think I must have been a lecturer for quite a long time. Previously, the universities promoted book writers who were considered as scholars, to senior lectureships. People who wrote papers were not considered as serious academics. That was how I think we were seen in those days. Ironically and paradoxically, with the opening of the need for university to generate income and grants, government started asking for evidence of individual work. People who were publishing in journals, books, bringing in research grants and income, having and recruiting postgraduate students, were seen in a rather different kind of light. That gave a great impetus to my career. I was discovered after teaching for 20 years. Instead of going through the normal route from lecturer to senior lecturer, I went from lecturer to reader. I was in my early 40s at that time. I got my readership when I was 42 and my professorship at the age of 45. I also became the head of department for a number of years. I stayed at Art University for nearly 25 years.

I then came to Warwick University as a Professor. At Warwick, I continued developing new research areas connected to my research interest. I worked towards securing research grants and building more collaborative networks with scholars within and outside the UK. Besides networking, I believe that mentoring is a very good system in terms of supporting people's work and having critical friends who monitor and help one to develop their careers. You've got to network both nationally and internationally. There is this peer recognition and I guess there are very acceptable academic reasons why academics attend conferences and other networking activities. Apart from just a career activity, it is also about developing the field. It also allows a lot of younger people into that field. It is during these networking activities that new ideas would come in. However, I don't think I had a mentor. But I had good colleagues who have been very supportive: good colleagues who promoted me and promoted my work; promoted me in the sense of supporting me in developing my career. I owe a lot to other people like my previous tutors, supervisors and significant colleagues. They are the significant people who do have an impact, whom one looks up to when one needs help and support.

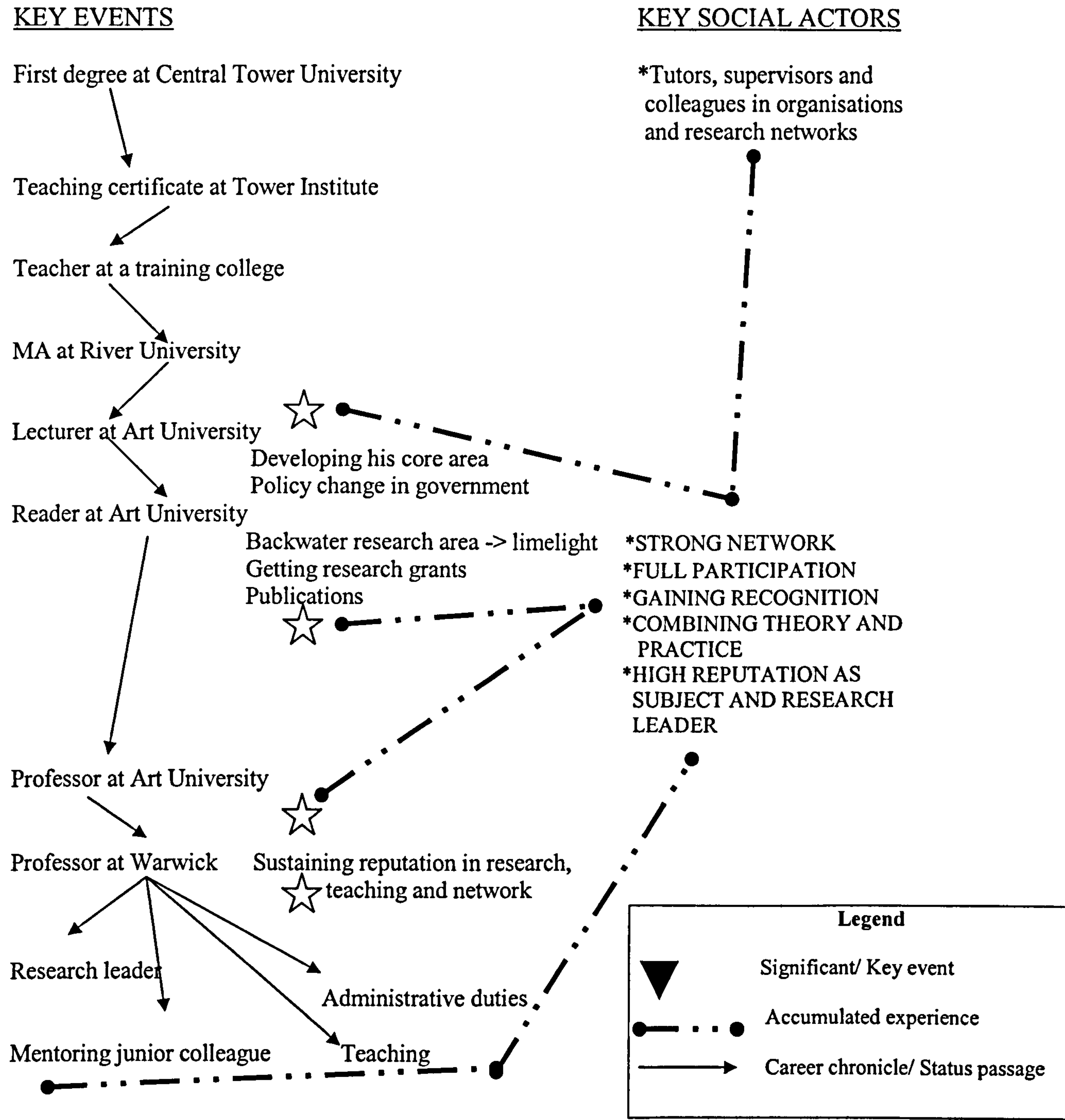


On becoming a professor, I believe that it denotes recognition by peers and recognition by the academic system. You are respected for your expertise in the field. It is an achievement, a status and it denotes seniority. It is normally gained through research and teaching. You are recognised as an expert in your field by your peers nationally and internationally. It also denotes a leadership and administrative role. You provide some leadership in your field and in your department, in bringing in younger staff, in inspiring your colleagues and in encouraging them to develop. The professor has a wider function being an authority to speak broadly on his or her field of study.

Looking back on my career, there was no systematic career pattern, there was nothing laid out about working in the university. I certainly didn't change my research interest because it became sexy or very popular. I was working in that field way before and I am still there. So my academic career is a mixture of not only thinking and planning, but also about serendipity that happens. It doesn't follow a linear career pattern at all. The promotion, I suppose, is because I had published 3 books and a lot of papers that had been well received and well reviewed, and I brought in millions of pounds of research funding. That has been an impact on my career and my promotion in academia. It does not follow a linear form. To some people, it will be mapped out, but for me, it was not really a smooth transition. I believe that the higher education workplace is becoming more competitive and academics should work smart and keep abreast with the current in their field to sustain recognition in the world of academia.



**Figure 12: How I came to be where I am today:  
Analysis for Professor Derek Social**



Key phrases:

“My career development is a mixture between thinking, planning and a lot of serendipity. It does not follow a linear form. To some people, it will be mapped out, but for me, it was not really a smooth transition.”

### **Commentary on Professor Derek Social**

Professor Derek Social was an undergraduate at Central Tower University. He then took a teaching certificate course and started his teaching career at a teacher training college. At the same time Derek did his Masters degree. He then left the teacher training college to become a lecturer at Art University. While at Art University, Derek's research area began to be recognised as an important field by the government. He began getting research grants. He became the head of the department and began taking some administrative roles. At the same time, he published widely in his field of study. Derek stayed at Art University for nearly 25 years where his career path unfolded from lecturer to reader and three years later, professor. He then moved to Warwick University as a professor. At Warwick, he continued developing his research interest, bidding for research grants and building more collaborative networks with scholars within and outside the UK. Derek's narrative highlights some key social actors in his academic career. His former tutors, supervisors and colleagues in various research networks had been very supportive throughout his career. Derek's active involvement in various committees and communities of scholars provided him with the support and resources to develop his reputation nationally and internationally. Derek's career story reveals a number of key events in his academic life. The growing interest and a shift in the focus of the government and policy-makers towards his research area became a critical point in shaping his future career. With this added advantage, Derek was able to contribute on a wider scale. The recognition given to his ability to secure grants for further research and to publish articles and books became another turning point in his academic career. He eventually became an international figure in his field of study.

#### 4.5 Summary of the chapter

This chapter profiled the university and the professors who were involved in the study. It provides the reader with the context for the study. The background information on the university, the faculty and the professors' career stories represents the context in which the career actors move about and through various organisational discourses. Based on the perceptions and views of the career actors themselves, I have described how the professors related their careers, including how they embraced, negotiated or rejected roles. I have described both their organisational context and individual identity work that jointly formed the history of how people have come to be professors.

Some career stories highlighted how the Warwick Way (University of Warwick's organisational culture) and the close relationship linking university, industry and community have an impact on the professors' identities as academics. The professors' career stories also illustrated some examples that could be linked to the communitarian concept of academic identity highlighted by Henkel (2000) and the communities of practice model (COPs) developed by Lave and Wenger (1991). The individual professors experienced academic socialisation and developed their identities through self-commitment to their subject areas and active participation within the various communities that they belonged to. The professors' active participation in various COPs represented the constant process of learning to negotiate and to position their individual and social identities in academia. Thus, academic socialisation involves a continuous interaction between social structure and individual agency. The interaction formed an



established system of recognising and promoting the works of academics throughout their careers.

In short, these career stories also enabled me to explore and develop common themes covering both objective and subjective dimensions of a career, professional socialisation, organisational learning and the construction of academic identity. Using the professors' career stories, Chapters 5 and 6 will further discuss these themes in the light of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

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## CHAPTER 5

### Gaining Recognition in Academia

#### 5.0 Introduction

The main aim of this study is to explore the experiences of academics moving through different stages in their careers. Chapter 2 reviewed the concepts of academic socialisation, organisational learning, academic identity and ‘communities of practice’ (COPs), which underpin this study. The use of in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviewing research as the methodology of the study, as discussed in Chapter 3, enabled the previous chapter to illustrate the profiles of the university and the professors who were involved in the study. Using the professors’ career stories and the diagrammatic summaries, Chapter 4 described how the professors embraced opportunities, negotiated access and achieved recognition throughout their careers.

Using the informants’ career stories, this chapter will analyse their academic induction and socialisation processes in the light of the literature on academic careers, learning at work, and specifically the concept of communities of practice (COPs) reviewed in Chapter 2. To explore the practical mechanisms through which professorial careers are developed, the professors’ accounts are discussed under the following headings:

- Moving into academia: Developing the interest
- Gaining recognition in academia

- Learning through one's career
- Challenges faced in developing one's career
- Coping strategies used in developing one's career

This chapter is organised in such a way as to explore the professors' career experiences along a particular time frame, beginning with their university years (as undergraduate and postgraduate students) and ending with their present post as professors. Each heading will be discussed and analysed accordingly. Some conclusions are then offered at the end of the chapter.

### **5.1 Moving into academia: Developing the interest**

The 12 professors in this study were asked to describe how they moved into becoming an academic. There are three patterns of becoming an academic identified among them.

- Eight started as an academic after their postgraduate and post-doctoral studies (Mary, Charles, Ronald, John, Mark, Peter, Derek and Alan).
- Two started as researchers before taking up lecturing jobs (James and Katherine).
- The other two were in different professions before moving into academia (Matt and Richard).

Mary, Charles, Ronald, John, Mark, Peter, Derek and Alan became academics after finishing their postgraduate and post-doctoral studies. Mary and Charles felt that their



interest in becoming academics was inspired by their enthusiastic lecturers and colleagues during their undergraduate and postgraduate years:

*I thought of becoming an academic on my first week as an undergraduate at Tower University. I fell in love with and studied my subject properly. My real motivation was my enduring fascination with the philosophy of social science (Mary Social).*

*After 5 or 6 terms there (Castle University), being taught by a number of impressive lecturers, I became very much interested in an academic career...I got a scholarship to go to the graduate programme at Boulevard University...My fellow graduate school colleagues were very enthusiastic and they created a very interesting and creative environment...This experience confirmed me that I was going into a career that I wanted to do (Charles Arts).*

John and Peter also felt that their interest in becoming an academic was inspired by their lecturers' enthusiasm in carrying out their teaching and research. The lecturers became their role models:

*When I was a student at Avon University, one of the lecturers impressed me as an academic GP. He combined general practice and research...He was the role model and that created the interest...It is very enjoyable as it gives me the practical as well as the theoretical satisfaction (John Medicine).*

*It happened when I was nearly finishing my undergraduate studies research project. I got very excited with my subject area because the person whom I worked with for my undergraduate research project, was very enthusiastic and very dynamic. He showed me how interesting the area is (Peter Science).*

Mark was drawn into becoming an academic through his experience studying and working closely with his PhD supervisors at Avon University:

*The academics, especially my PhD supervisor at Avon, gave me various kinds of teaching and supervision. I was lucky that I knew them very well. They were the leading scholars in my field...I was very lucky that I was thrown immediately into this kind of academic environment. Retrospectively, I could see how events of good luck have assisted me in my academic development (Mark Science).*

Despite coming from a family of academics, Matt and Alan had different ways of starting their careers. Alan, whose father was also a professor, moved straight into a lecturing job while doing his PhD at Golden University. After getting his PhD, Alan decided to work as a researcher at various research institutes before leaving for the US, and eventually came back to the UK to become a professor.

Unlike Alan, Matt started as an administrator in a government office. Matt's first job, which required him to prepare government reports eventually made him realise that his interest actually rested in doing academic research. That gave an impetus for him to resign, pursue his PhD and became an academic:

*I come from an academic family. My father was a professor and a pro vice chancellor and my grandfather was a professor and a vice chancellor. However, I decided to go off and become a civil servant...I was in the civil service for three years during which time I learnt a lot about administration, which has undoubtedly been very useful in the long run, but I also became very bored. I decided that what I really did like was thinking: academic research...I felt that I might as well have a go at studying art further, seeing whether I could establish an academic career (Matt Arts).*

Like Matt, some of the informants came late into academia. James and Katherine started as full-time researchers before taking up their academic posts. Katherine commented:

*I liked working at the university. I decided not to do a PhD. Instead, I decided to move directly into becoming a contract researcher (Katherine Social).*

Richard was a professional engineer before joining the university. His interest in combining his industrial experience with academic work sparked his interest in becoming an academic:

*After graduating, I spent 2 years working in the industry because I felt that it would be a useful experience. However, I liked the academic world in collaboration with industry. So I then returned to Border to take a short-term research job and eventually a permanent job as lecturer (Richard Science).*

The majority of the professors in the study moved straight into an academic job after finishing their postgraduate and postdoctoral fellowships. However, two of them did not start out as academics. One left and eventually moved back into becoming an academic. These patterns indicated that the process of becoming an academic is not always linear and homogeneous. The patterns are also consistent with the findings made by Arthur et al. (1999), in their study on 75 career actors in New Zealand. They highlighted that in pursuit of career exploration and growth, some individuals try new occupations and positions in order to learn, progress and seek for new opportunities.

In addition, although a number of my informants did not specifically emphasise one significant aspect of their career experiences, my analysis of the career stories revealed that most of my informants who went straight to become academics were graduates of Golden University, considered as an elite university in the UK. It should be noted that the term 'elite' here refers to a university that is highly ranked for its quality of teaching and



research. This evidence significantly shows how their early exposure to a high-quality academic environment and the opportunities to study with a number of influential academics who became their role models enabled some of my informants to make sense of what it is like to become a professor, which, in turn led them to become academics themselves.

However, I acknowledge that the process of ‘becoming an academic’ involves more than discussing academic genealogies and pedigrees. Lawy and Bloomer (2003) suggest that the process of ‘becoming’ is always under construction, not given or found. Henkel (2000) suggests that upon moving into academia, a new academic’s career path will dominantly be self-driven. Nevertheless, the process of ‘becoming an academic’ also involves a social accomplishment that ‘consists of negotiating the meanings of our experiences of membership in social communities’ (Wenger, 1998, p. 145). Individual academics and their communities constitute and constantly shape each other, with each giving meaning to the other. Following Wenger (1998), Lawy and Bloomer (2003), and others, I see that the process of ‘becoming’, which includes the transformation of one’s identity, is actually a lifelong process. In the context of this study, I believe that another significant phase in academic socialisation is to gain recognition in academia. The following section explores how the academics in the study move into their academic communities and gain recognition throughout their careers.

## **5.2 Gaining recognition in academia**

The professors were asked to recall some significant events on how they gained recognition in academia. This section will discuss and analyse their descriptions starting

from how they were first introduced into the academic communities to their continuous efforts in sustaining their recognition within academia.

### **5.2.1 Moving into the academic communities: Legitimate peripheral participation**

The academics in the study explained how they began their life as academics. Most of the academics in the study revealed the importance of their early exposure as active participants in their academic communities. The early affirmation that they gained from their peers motivated them to progress in their careers. This early affirmation echoes Wenger's (1998, pp. 73-74) suggestion on the significant element of becoming a participant of a COP, that is, to be 'included':

The first characteristic of practice as the source of coherence of a community is the mutual engagement of participants...Practice exists because people are engaged in actions whose meanings they negotiate with one another. Practice resides in a community of people and the relations of mutual engagement by which they can do whatever they do. Membership in a community of practice is therefore a matter of mutual engagement...being included in what matters is a requirement for being engaged in a community's practice, just as engagement is what defines belonging.

Being included in a COP naturally provides the starting point for a newcomer to participate actively. Yet, it should be acknowledged that to be included in a COP requires both the opportunities provided by the experienced members, as well as the novices' self-initiative (Billett, 2002). The following sub-headings, namely, 'learning from the experienced members' and 'developing one's mastery', describe the academics'

experiences of how they were introduced into their respective COPs, a process which Lave and Wenger (1991) term as ‘legitimate peripheral participation’.

#### **a. Learning from the experienced members**

The opportunities to work alongside some experienced colleagues at the beginning of their careers enabled Matt, Ronald, Mary, and Katherine to move into their academic communities. They became involved through a process of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), which enable them to try out and gain some recognition as participants of their COPs. The notion ‘peripheral’ denotes the minimal risk and their ‘trial and error’ manner of participating. According to Lave and Wenger (1991, p. 29), the idea of legitimate peripheral participation suggests that, ‘the mastery of knowledge and skill requires the newcomers to move toward full participation in the socio-cultural practices of the community.’ As described in Chapter 4, examples such as Matt’s administrative experience at Santa, Mary’s active involvement in a professional association led by Professor Teddy, Ronald’s engagement with Professor Franz’s colleagues illustrate how their early participation with experienced colleagues helped them to access and gain some recognition within their academic communities. Katherine felt that her first introduction to the academic communities was facilitated through the help of her experienced colleagues:

*I was lucky to start working at one of the early business schools in the UK... Through the help of my mentors...I became known and accumulated the competencies, which eventually gave me recognition within my field of study...I got invited through good references (Katherine Social).*

However, it should also be highlighted that gaining recognition entails more than merely working with the experienced members of one’s COPs. Moving through legitimate



peripheral to full participation also involves some aspects of power relations and requires a participant to position him- or herself appropriately within the COP. Participating and positioning oneself within one's COPs is like playing a game, a concept derived from the notion of the 'field' (Bourdieu, 1988; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Lave and Wenger (1991, p. 42) recognise that 'in particular, unequal relations of power must be included more systematically in our analysis.' Similarly, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) suggest that players have unequal positions in the game and each player has to constantly strive to achieve some form of recognition from the others. From these perspectives, the academics in this study are players in the field of academia. Besides 'learning from the experienced members', the findings of this study demonstrate another significant aspect of how my informants gained their introduction into their academic communities. It involves 'developing one's mastery' (Bucher and Stelling, 1977).

**b. Developing one's mastery: Negotiating recognition within academia**

As highlighted earlier, newcomers and/or novices are not passive participants in academia. They have to seek opportunities to contribute to their academic communities. The introduction into one's academic communities also involves an individual's distinctive action so as to signal to the others one's arrival into academia. The career stories of Matt, Ronald, Peter and Mark demonstrated some key events when they, as novices, began to develop their mastery and identity as a full participant within their COPs.

Matt's ability to edit a high-profile journal at his early career stage gained the attention of his colleagues. Since then, he has developed his reputation as an efficient editor and scholar:

*I was asked to co-edit a volume of a respected journal. This was a fairly high-profile and high-prestige project. It was quite an honour to be asked to be involved for a fairly young scholar. I was asked because someone else pulled out, and they needed to find someone in this particular area within a fairly short notice. I suppose they took a gamble on me, But that obviously raised my profile. It allowed me to demonstrate that I was quite an effective editor and since then, I have done quite a lot of editing (Matt Arts).*

Like Matt, Ronald felt that he began getting some recognition from his academic communities after publishing a translated work about an influential artist with Cambridge University Press:

*I was very fortunate when I did work on a famous European artist...I had a conversation with a colleague that I knew a bit about this famous artist. Through him, I was then offered by Cambridge University Press to write something about that artist. As a young scholar, I felt that the invitation should be taken seriously and eventually it opened up many more opportunities (Ronald Arts).*

Peter, Mark and Katherine described the importance of 'building your presence' and 'making a big impact' as one way of negotiating one's recognition within one's COPs.

*Get your work recognised and you will gradually be invited into the communities of practice...build your presence in a particular area so people will know that 'so and so' is in the field of 'so and so', and that is when you get noticed (Katherine Social).*

Peter and Mark described how they used conferences and talk sessions to disseminate their scholarly work and introduce themselves to their academic communities:

*Once you get the opportunity, you have to work very hard to be able to make quite a big impact...I guess what I also did was that I began by giving talks at other departments...the talks went down well and word spread around. Eventually other people invite you to give more talks (Peter Science).*

*I ran a conference when I was very young and not known at all. I invited nearly 200 world scientists to come to Warwick. That was a big privilege. It was so exciting and exactly the time when various important things in my research were taking place... these works started taking off from the conference. It became a major branch of science and a lot of people began to recognise my research area (Mark Science).*

These quotes illustrate why Lave and Wenger (1991) emphasise the importance of novices participating within the margins of a community of more experienced practitioners. The opportunities to work and to contribute actively alongside their experienced colleagues enable the novices to master the practice and move towards 'full membership' (Lave and Wenger, 1991). In his later work, Wenger (1998, pp. 226-227) recommends that:

Learning is a matter of engagement. It denotes the opportunities to contribute actively to the practices of communities that we value and value us, to integrate their enterprises into our understanding of the world, and to make creative use of their respective repertoires.

Through working with experienced members, Matt, Ronald, Mary, and Katherine learnt to make sense of what it means to become an academic and how to socialise within the academic communities. Consequently, their dispositions to knowledge and learning in their careers and their identities as academics underwent some changes. Alan's description of receiving helpful comments from two distinguished professors in his field - "I was amazed by these events. These people were gods to me! ...I felt invited into the



community, I felt valued and that was very important to me” – demonstrate how a novice may even transform his or her disposition based on interaction with experienced members. Billett (1998, p. 25) suggests that disposition, like one’s interests, values and preferences, ‘determine whether individuals value a particular form of knowledge enough to be willing to participate in the effortful activity required to secure that knowledge.’ In a similar vein, Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004) relate the significance of disposition to learning by using Bourdieu’s (1984) idea of ‘habitus’. They define habitus as ‘a largely internalised, subconscious battery of dispositions that orientate a person’s actions in any situation’ (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2004, p. 174). Through participating alongside their experienced colleagues, novices gradually transform their dispositions towards learning to become more competent academics (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000).

The informants indicated how affirmation and recognition by experienced colleagues shaped their habitus (Bourdieu, 1984) and ‘learning careers’ (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000) and inspired them to develop their mastery via learning throughout their careers. The affirmation and recognition are significant because having different dispositions influence different learners to perceive and react differently towards similar opportunities provided by their social structures (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2004; Bathmaker and Avis, 2005; Fuller et al., 2005).

However, it should be noted that legitimate peripheral participation is a concept that not only applies to novices, but also to masters. Legitimate peripheral participation denotes that a COP will usually be made up of uneven membership. ‘At different times, the

“masters” and the “novices” will be different individuals’ (Ball, 2003, p. 303). The findings of the study revealed how novices and experienced members learnt through participation and eventually developed their mastery through shared experiences. Developing one’s identity as a participant in a COP never ends. An individual negotiates and also needs to sustain his or her recognition within the COP as the practice evolves. In other words, learning to participate continues throughout one’s career. The following section will discuss how my informants sustained their recognition within their COPs.

### **5.2.2 Sustaining one’s recognition within academia: Becoming a full practitioner**

Participants in COPs are not passive career actors. The professors in the study demonstrated that success in academia not only involves an individual’s ability to gain access to participate within one’s COPs, but also requires the individual to be able to sustain his or her identity as a competent practitioner within the rules or structures provided by each COP.

Alan, who felt that an academic should be able to “threaten and upset the people who came before” in order to succeed in one’s career, had a similar view about sustaining one’s recognition when the time came for him to accept criticism from the younger generation:

*As a young researcher, you do not realise that some people might be hostile to you and to your work. Some of my articles were rejected and marked as bad...some people don’t like you because you are inevitably threatening their work. And now being a 50-year old academic, I feel that*

*I am being threatened by the new generation, the young ones and I feel fine...that is fine and normal in academia (Alan Social).*

Peter and Katherine also highlighted the importance of sustaining their reputation as academics and the way they are recognised by members of their COPs:

*It is easy to become a bit demoralised when criticism comes and you struggle a little bit. However, to succeed, you've got to remain optimistic...keep the excitement going because if you lose the enjoyment, you won't gain success (Peter Science).*

*I believe the key thing is to stay as a prestigious scholar by doing research, as it is the way of maintaining recognition within one's own field (Katherine Social).*

Mary provided an interesting comment about sustaining recognition within one's COPs. She used the analogy of a commentator and a player to show how she sustains her recognition among her colleagues. She preferred to maintain herself as a player rather than a commentator. For Mary, being a player enabled her to position herself appropriately and to remain influential in her subject area:

*I always see myself as a player...there is a major distinction between a commentator and a player. A commentator is always shaped by the discipline: producing endless books that are not original and giving views based on others' argument. They like to comment and to make sure that their presence is felt. Players do work that is interesting, novel, different and is an original contribution...it is about perseverance...I will never stop contributing (Mary Social).*

As indicated in the findings, instead of positioning themselves as passive and reactive participants, the academics in the study constantly negotiated their recognition at different stages in their careers. They believed that academics should continuously learn



to master 'the rules of the game' and accumulate their 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1984, 1988; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) using the social structures formed by their COPs, and to position themselves appropriately. 'The structures accommodate the framework for participation and the development of mastery' (Ball, 2003, p. 304). Comments made by Katherine and Mary demonstrate how the structures enabled these academics to negotiate and to sustain their recognition within academia. Mary's interesting comments about the distinction between a commentator and a player again are consistent with Bourdieu's (1984, 1988) idea of 'field, game, capital and habitus' and Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of 'unequal relations of power'. Often related to this unequal standing and positioning is the idea that each player and/or commentator possesses different 'habitus' and amounts of capital (cultural, symbolic and social) with which to play the game. Each 'field', subject area or 'academic tribe and territory' has different ways of valuing its cultural capital (Clark, 1987; Bourdieu, 1984, 1988; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Delamont et al., 2000; Becher and Trowler, 2001). From Mary's perspective, a player who is supported by greater cultural capital of the 'field' and 'tribe' alongside his or her symbolic and social capital, would have better standing, resources and influence than a commentator who presumably possesses lesser capital in hand to participate in the game.

Another important lesson learnt from the professors' comments in relation to sustaining recognition within one's COPs, is the existence of generational encounters and multiple level memberships (Wenger, 1998; Down and Reveley, 2004). It explains that the use of the term 'community' does not always 'imply harmony or collaboration' (Wenger, 1998,

p. 85). Conflict may exist among members of a COP. In the context of this study, generational encounters and conflicts may occur between different schools of thought in one's academic discipline and between older and younger academics. As suggested by Wenger (1998, p. 83), 'An important aspect of generational encounters is younger people coming into contact with the established repertoire (or cultural tradition) and using it to create new sets of meanings.' Alan's comments revealingly indicated his view of his academic communities, divided between the "people before you" who defend and maintain the way that things have been done in the past, and the "young generation", who have a general aspiration to improve and replace existing academic practices.

The informants' descriptions on the way they negotiated and sustained their recognition in academia indicate the importance of continuous learning and accumulating their forms of capital (cultural, symbolic and social) in their careers. The next section will discuss how the professors learn throughout their careers as part of experiencing their academic socialisation processes.

### **5.3 Learning throughout one's career**

How did the academics in the study learn to become full practitioners in academia? This section will discuss and analyse learning throughout one's career as perceived by the professors. The informants were asked to describe how they have learnt throughout their careers. Their responses indicated that their learning arose naturally out of the demands and challenges of their jobs as academics and out of social interactions with their colleagues within various COPs. The analyses of the interviews generated the following

themes: (1) learning through engaging with ongoing work practice; (2) learning through reflecting on past experiences; (3) learning by developing new ideas and structures; and (4) learning through working with other colleagues.

### 5.3.1 Learning through engaging with ongoing work practice

The professors stressed the importance of participating actively in everyday work practice to develop one's mastery. They experienced various tasks involving complexities and serendipity, and solved numerous challenging and problematic situations. Their accounts are consistent with Gherardi and Nicolini's (2002) description of 'learning the trade'. That is, the work practice encourages them to learn through modelling, replicating and adapting other colleagues' way of doing things. Derek and Peter highlighted the elements of serendipity in their engagement in academic practice, which provided them with opportunities to think and to plan their future career undertakings.

*So my academic career is a mixture of not only thinking and planning, but also about serendipity that happens (Derek Social).*

*It is serendipity but you have to select the right areas, have good judgement and intuition on how things might turn out (Peter Science).*

James and Matt felt that most of their learning, especially problem-solving which involved the elements of risk and gamble, enabled them to make sense and master the practice of becoming an academic more effectively because these opportunities are based on real life experiences:

*I was persuaded to leave the big research institute to come to a small university at that time...Some people thought I was rather foolish but I was willing to come. There was an element of risk...One of the privileges is that I could choose my colleagues and I could go abroad...I could*



*design degree courses...That was the opportunity and the freedom...It is learning on the job. What I learnt the most is to always take responsibility and accept the consequences (James Arts).*

*I was asked [to co edit a journal] because someone else pulled out...I suppose they took a gamble on me. But that obviously raised my profile. The second thing...[was] to increase the number of postgraduates in our area at Santa...someone had to organise this and that was really my first significant academic organisational responsibility. It was quite challenging and in the few years...we did manage to increase the number of students...There is no substitute for the experience of doing it (Matt Arts).*

By engaging and interacting with ongoing work practice, the professors consciously and subconsciously developed a 'repertoire of skills' (Eraut, 1985) and constantly learnt to perform their tasks (Vygotsky, 1962; Engestrom, 1987; Suchman, 1987; Bruner, 1991; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Chaiklin and Lave, 1993; Wenger, 1998). Their task mastery gradually improved as they progressed in their careers. Interestingly, they also believed that the level of mastery in undertaking and accomplishing various tasks influenced their level of participation and position in their COPs.

### **5.3.2 Learning through reflecting on past experiences**

The professors also highlighted the importance of reflecting on one's past experiences as a way of learning and developing one's mastery of the practice. Using past experiences and mistakes, the professors alter and vary their solutions in undertaking their future career undertakings. For this theme, two sub-themes emerge: learning through improvisation and adaptation, and learning via working at various places.

### **a. Learning through improvisation and adaptation**

Self-reflection was one of the ways that Alan used in developing his academic practice. By reflecting on his previous work, he learnt to improve himself. He insisted on the importance of developing one's subject anchor area in order to contribute and succeed in an academic career. This anchor area echoes Henkel's (2000) idea of an academic locating oneself in a distinctive moral and conceptual framework. His learning came through the feedback, constructive debates and suggestions that he got from journal editors and others within his communities of scholars. Alan's ability to understand and to improve his work, based on the feedback of his 'invisible college' and members of his various COPs (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), enabled him to develop his competence and transform his identity as an academic. By learning through improvisation and adaptation, Alan subconsciously altered his professional judgment to become a better practitioner:

*Another reflection is that I see more flaws in my earlier work. The younger me tends to be very clever at solving technical problems whereas the older me tends to be more on senses. I also think that it is important to work on the field for some years. I don't think you can make major contributions without doing 5 years in that area. I chop and change, chop and change field and people do not pay much attention if you just publish one or two papers...Over a number of years, I have created a few anchor areas...As far as learning at work is concerned, I learnt from nasty journal referee reports. I can think of 200 journal rejections. Don't look at the rejection. Bounce back. This rejection is normal in academia. The ability to bounce back is very important (Alan Social).*

James reflected on his previous experience as a student to design the curriculum at his department. Using his freedom as the head of the department, James introduced a course that requires his students to master one foreign language and to study abroad for a term as



part of understanding more about foreign arts and culture. James's pragmatic idea about 'a term abroad', based on the adaptation of his previous experience, eventually was adopted by his colleagues in other universities in the UK:

*Another significant event in my career at Warwick was that it also enabled me to criticise the discipline I had been taught...My argument was that the subject area did not include enough about the material and culture that produced these works of art...I had the opportunity to insist that our students should learn other languages as well. I had a fellowship abroad and I persuaded colleagues that the students should also be given a term abroad (James Arts).*

Through reflecting and comparing his past and present research experiences, John realised that his reputation as an active researcher has gradually shifted to include his becoming an effective academic manager. John learnt to be more cautious in making sure that he gave sufficient focus to his teaching, research and administration:

*When one's research area gathers up or creates more momentum, your reputation naturally follows from there...I realise that eventually I am driving myself into a university administrative role but I also need to look into my research interest. I believe that if you are gone too far towards the administrative route, you cannot really come back because you have lost your research reputation, and have more reputation in terms of being an administrator (John Medicine).*

Besides learning from their past experiences, some of the informants developed their mastery through reflecting and modelling other people's way of doing things. Mark learnt to improve his lecturing through modelling his colleagues' style of teaching:

*However, I definitely had academics whom I admired, people whose lecturing became some kind of a model which I tended to follow (Mark Science).*



Interestingly, Matt and Alan occasionally reflected on their fathers' (who were professors) ways of doing things and past performance in order to successfully manage their lives as academics:

*If you've got a young family like I have, then there are quite a lot of considerable external demands. I am aware that I certainly realised this when I was growing up myself. My father was regularly invisible. He regularly worked on Sunday afternoons, tended to go to the office on Saturday. He was not visible as a family person and I try to be a bit better than that (Matt Arts).*

*I was very competitive and very driven to get to the top. I was almost certainly competing with my father (Alan Social).*

People improve and adapt when they experience pressure and feel a need to invent ways of overcoming it in undertaking future tasks (Arthur et al., 1999; Valkeavaara, 1999). A number of professors shared their experiences of learning from their earlier mistakes, weaknesses and problematic situations. Consistent with Fuller and Unwin's (2005) findings on experienced workers' learning, the informants in this study continuously reflected on their previous practices and used their accumulated 'career competencies' (Arthur et al., 1999) to improve themselves and better adapt to their present and future practices. Alan improved his writing through getting positive and negative feedback from his colleagues, for example, in journal referee reports. Charles reflected on his successes and failures in undertaking previous projects to develop a better approach and solution when handling new projects. Matt used his previous experience working in the civil service to facilitate the way he administers his academic department:

*Being in the civil service, you learn to prioritise work, you learn how to operate on a committee, you learn how to take notes for a committee, and*

*learn how to be quite precise with language as well...It probably influences my career, the way I do things...which has undoubtedly been very useful in the long run (Matt Arts).*

Richard described the importance of improvisation and adaptation in one's academic career:

*I think adaptability is the most important thing to become a professor. I myself am a professor but I've got to adapt and change my research approach parallel to the needs of my field and other surroundings. You might still have certain things in common, but gradually it evolves (Richard Science).*

Improvisation and adaptation enabled the professors to become better participants within their various COPs. They developed their professional maturity, confidence and continued to make sense of what it means to become an academic.

#### **b. Learning through working at various places**

The professors' experiences of working at various places enabled them to adapt, reflect, and improve their competence as academics. This form of learning includes asking for advice, having discussions, consulting experienced colleagues and learning from their experiences. The informants' accounts show the different approaches adopted by British scholars, as compared to their colleagues abroad, towards their academic discipline. By working at various places throughout their careers, they exposed themselves to more diverse practices.

These experiences had some impact on their careers. Alan shared his experiences as a visiting lecturer. The experiences taught him about the importance of broadening and



exploring one's career by working with people at various places. By working with colleagues at various institutions, he learnt many different ways of researching and teaching in his field of study:

*Eventually, I thought that it would be important to go to America when I was young. It was important to build my stock of knowledge. It was good for my curriculum vitae. I thought that I would learn more. When I went to the US, I was in my late 20s. I met some very good scholars. I discovered that they have different ways of doing their subjects. They valued different things and that was very challenging and good for me. If you move, you will blossom: that is my judgment. It gave me an insight to a new way of thinking. I realised that I was very amateurish before this. I did explore a lot. I went to the US quite a narrow kind of person and came back a broader kind of person with much more confidence. In my opinion, as a young scholar, don't stay in one institution for 20 years. Get yourself exposed to different ways of doing things (Alan Social).*

Like Alan, Peter's research fellowship in the US enabled him to expand his understanding and knowledge in his field of study:

*Moving to the US for my post-doctoral was one of the big things...I learnt so much there as they do research in a different way. It opened my eyes to a broader and dynamic way (Peter Science).*

Katherine added that each university where she used to work provided a range of significant learning for her academic career. These diverse learning experiences, which included observing, listening and working alongside experienced colleagues, helped her to become a better researcher, teacher, and administrator:

*I guess I learnt a lot when I moved from one university to the other. Each has its own unique culture and people. You always come with a reputation and I learnt how to do things in the new place. Various places give various significant learning, for instance research at University A, teaching at University B, developing curriculum at University C and administration and mentoring younger colleagues at University D (Katherine Social).*



Mark's experiences working at various places transformed his approaches towards research and teaching in his subject area:

*During my postdoctoral fellowship at Avon, I also took the chance to spend a few years as a visiting research fellow in Asia and Eastern Europe under the British Council exchange programme...you have got to move around and spend your time abroad. I went abroad and I would meet a lot of scientists there. I would learn from them, collaborate and pick up something that would be very useful. At least, it might change my directions of study (Mark Science).*

All in all, the academics' careers have been dedicated to learning, achieved through frequent travelling and moving from one university to another. Travelling and working at various places became critical events in shaping their future careers. They became international figures and established strong network contacts throughout the world. Through working at various places, the academics developed their 'forms of capital', 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1984, 1988; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) and 'career capital' (Arthur et al., 1999) as academics, built on their stock of knowledge and experiences to be reflected, compared and analysed. They primarily learnt from their past successes and failures provided by the various natures and cultures of their work contexts (Knight and Trowler, 2000; Boud and Middleton, 2003; Fuller and Unwin, 2005). These career experiences, which have an impact on their habitus and biographies, facilitate their movement in undertaking present and future work practice.

### **5.3.3 Learning through working with others**

Intertwined with working at various places, the professors also highlighted how they learnt through working with other colleagues. This theme was the most common way of

depicting how they learnt at work and progressed throughout their academic careers. Activities such as mentoring and networking involve the sharing of ideas and the opportunity to listen to, and to learn from each other's experiences. The academics in the study learnt that mentoring and networking provided them with exposure to various forms of social interactions, events and experiences. Through mentoring and networking, newcomers and established members were given the chance to co-participate and develop their mastery through their shared experiences (Mullen and Forbes, 2000; Cawyer et al., 2002). This continuous mutual learning enabled them to share stories with their colleagues on how to operate and succeed in their academic careers. Certainly, through mentoring and networking, a COP offers access to newcomers and the more experienced members to reappraise their competence and experience (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998).

#### **a. Mentoring**

According to the professors, mentoring activities enabled them to seek advice and support from their senior colleagues at the early career stage. The mentoring process can support individuals to sustain their self-esteem and well being in their working lives (Torrance, 1983, 1984; Torrance et al., 1998; Bennetts, 2000, 2004). Mentoring was one of the activities that provided them with ways to progress in their academic careers. Within this study, the definition of mentor provided by the academics was closely associated with that provided by Bennetts (2004, p. 368), who states that a mentor is the person who voluntarily forms a 'one-to-one developmental relationship with a learner, and one whom the learner identifies as having enabled personal growth to take place.'



Katherine's experience working with two professors enabled her to develop and improve her research skills. They facilitated Katherine's career growth and encouraged her to develop her confidence in becoming a successful academic. Katherine's mentoring relationships with Thomas and Helen have given a positive impact on her academic socialisation process. Based on her previous experience, Katherine now undertakes similar responsibility to pass on these unwritten rules of professional development to her younger colleagues:

*I got mentored in my early career, through working with Thomas and Helen, and now it is my turn to mentor the younger colleagues in charting out their careers. In a way, taking the roles that other people played for you before (Katherine Social).*

Like Katherine, Richard and Derek believed that the interpersonal bonding in mentoring provided them with the social support and professional advice to develop their careers:

*My head of department also gave me advice and encouraged me to think about my future. He was like a mentor for me to move further. Rules to progress are not very clear...and his advice was most valuable. Fortunately I took his advice and began to develop more confidence in myself (Richard Science).*

*I believe that mentoring is a very good system in terms of supporting people's work and having critical friends who monitor and help one to develop their careers (Derek Social).*

Mentoring enables the academics in the study to provide advice to their younger colleagues. Interestingly, they also make use of this close relationship to learn new things from junior colleagues. For instance, some of them described how junior colleagues keep them updated with the latest technology in their teaching and research. Therefore, mentoring actually provides the room for learning throughout one's career, regardless of



which stage the individual is at (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Mullen and Forbes, 2000; Cawyer et al., 2002). These findings are also consistent with a suggestion made by Guest (2004, p. 24) that mentoring ‘involves a long-term process, sharing experience, encouragement, insight through reflection and mutual learning’. Matt commented that:

*I think mentoring is essentially important in developing your own skills as well as to those you are mentoring. If you mentor you then reflect on what you are doing, how you are doing and how might it be done. So mentoring is an integral part of any academic duty (Matt Arts).*

Similarly, James viewed mentoring, which encourages interpersonal bonding and information exchange between a mentor and a protégé, as one way of facilitating the careers of the junior as well as the senior colleagues:

*I didn't have a mentor but I think mentoring is really important. I didn't have one because I started quite early in this area...I like the mentoring process...You have got to help them to know which is the appropriate journal or how many words. Don't send it here, send it there and so forth. Mentoring is all about reflecting on your career...It is learning on the job (James Arts).*

Another important aspect of mentoring is that most of the professors preferred informal mentoring rather than the formal or institutionalised form. This aspect of mentoring seemed to apply to Bennetts (2004) who notes that, unlike formal mentoring, the word mentor requires the learner's effort to enable one's learning rather than a result imposed and anticipated by one's organisation. Mary and Ronald shared their views on mentoring:

*I do [mentoring] actually. Informal and formal but it has to be completely voluntary...I believe mentoring properly means to me when I mentor my postgraduate students who move to the stage of postdoctoral researchers.*

*They need a lot of support. I write references for them and make phone calls (Mary Social).*

*[Between] formal and informal, I like the informal. The nature of this job is vocation, we are academics... you are there because you are curious. It is a whole way of life. You exemplify informality. Formal structure is not that authentic, as you need to find time where you can interact with other colleagues...Mentoring is absolutely crucial...it depends a lot on that kind of collegiality. I like the informal mentoring. I also mentor younger colleagues, write references for them and all in all, establish and maintain collegiality within my communities of practice (Ronald Arts).*

In the course of the study, I was surprised when some informants like Ronald, Charles and Katherine used the phrase ‘communities of practice’ in their responses. When I asked further, these academics demonstrated that they were familiar with the concept. They believed that the COPs model enabled both newcomers and experienced members to exchange information and develop each participant’s mastery of a practice. However, Ronald expressed his concern about how present academics have become too occupied with the need to conform to the ‘performance management culture’ in higher education system. Ronald’s accounts were similar to Henkel’s (2000) description of how some senior academics in the UK experienced two different eras: from the highly self-initiated academic lives to the more structured, rule-driven, performance management academic culture. Whilst acknowledging the need for academics to project themselves as efficient scholars, Ronald hoped that present academics would still have a lot of opportunities to engage in informal mentoring activities:

*Frustratingly, it is quite difficult these days. I missed that. In the past, I had a lot of time...You used to have time to get in touch with seniors, read and do research. You can go to the library. But now you become so busy with filling in forms that you don’t have enough time to do all that (Ronald Arts).*



Despite the importance of mentoring in one's academic socialisation, some of the professors stated that mentoring relationships should not encourage young academics to be highly dependent upon their senior colleagues. Instead, the young academics should also independently learn and develop their unique styles. Alan made this point:

*I believe, judging by my life, that it is a mistake to expect other people to help you academically much. I think a lot of young researchers and scholars think that famous professors became famous because somebody helped them when they were young. That is not true in general... You have to become known as a person who pushes the thought (Alan Social).*

Through reflecting on their experiences of mentoring relationships, Peter and Katherine echoed Alan's point of view:

*Some people say your academic career depends on whom you work with...as far as mentoring is concerned, I think I did it more myself. However, I got a little bit of help along the way (Peter Science).*

*As far as mentoring is concerned, I believe that I should not become too dependent on my sponsors. You need that in the early stage but you should learn to stand on your own and develop your research identity. You should be managing your own career. You don't want to become over-dependent and associated too much with your sponsors...as you develop, you need to establish your own identity and that is quite important. I worked with Thomas and Helen but then gradually I developed my research, generated my own work and in a way, became someone in my own right (Katherine Social).*

## **b. Networking**

Besides mentoring, networking also enables academics to assist one another as they progress throughout their careers (Blaxter et al., 1998). Through networking, the academics in the study narrated how they learnt more about the ways in which established academics make use of their informal or tacit knowledge to survive and



succeed in academia. Having more contacts in the form of both personal and professional networks is significant for one's academic socialisation and career advancement (Mullen and Forbes, 2000; Cawyer et al., 2002). Networking enabled the academics not to be too dependent upon their mentors and encouraged them to start thinking about developing their own identities and reputation as eminent scholars. Besides describing how networking, especially at conferences enabled him to master the practice of becoming an academic, Matt also indicated how this activity supported his role and responsibility as an academic manager:

*As the chair of the department in the university, networking is absolutely vital because you need to know how other people are doing their work successfully. Sometimes you network with people who are making the decision. And if you want a decision to go in your favour, regularly, the closeness of the network is absolutely vital...as a chair of the faculty, it is quite useful to know some things, which are happening in other universities. Of course you need to network so that people know who you are. People need to know that you are the person for the conference that they will go to (Matt Arts).*

Derek stated that networking activities enabled him and his colleagues to recognise each other's contributions to their field, to facilitate newcomers' academic socialisation and ultimately, to sustain their subject area:

*I had good colleagues and we are quite widely networked across the country and abroad. This is done through attending conferences, participating in associations, writing and editing for journals...you have got to network both nationally and internationally. There is this peer recognition and I guess there are very acceptable academic reasons why academics attend conferences and other networking activities. Apart from just a career activity, it is also about developing the field. It also allows a lot of younger people into that field. It is during these networking activities that new ideas would come in (Derek Social).*

In addition to mentoring, Katherine believed that networking activities allow an academic to gain and sustain one's recognition within academia:

*Mentoring and networking which includes editing, referencing, attending conferences and doing research, are two important aspects in one's academic career. I built up my publication of articles and books. I accumulated my editorial work and gained recognition from people in my academic community (Katherine Social).*

Alan and Charles pointed out that their networking activities were not only confined to academics but included others such as journalists and publishers:

*I also have my own way of linking to the community, like talking to journalists even though my colleagues think that it is a bad idea. I started talking to journalists and look at it as an investment. I build up and develop my network. Relationships are quite important in the media. If you are nice to reporters, they will remember you. They will come to you more and more. I am okay doing that sort of networking (Alan Social).*

*Quite a lot of people knew me and I was useful for them in terms of book reviews and reading manuscripts...As books are so important in my field, publishers are another strand in the network. I did have their help: They published my books. I went to major conferences and it is there that one markets books and manuscripts (Charles Arts).*

Networking was also crucial to those who have never experienced mentoring relationships at their early career stage. Derek and John described how networking facilitated their academic socialisation processes:

*I don't think I had a mentor. But I had good colleagues who have been very supportive: Good colleagues who promoted me and promoted my work; promoted me in the sense of supporting me in developing my career...They are the significant people who do have an impact, whom one looks up to when one needs help and support (Derek Social).*



*I did not have a formal mentor or coach. However, there were some very good colleagues at Royal. There was peer support and there were also some good networks. I was part of those networks and they were very supportive (John Medicine).*

Similarly, Charles, who participated in various professional networks in the UK as well as in the US, emphasised that:

*I don't think my career resulted from the door being opened by somebody else or some influential people...I was self-initiated. I had found myself working in overlapping networks without the interference of any influential people...it becomes apparent that it is not the model that I used. I rely on various communities of practice. The more you have, the more opportunities you have in developing your career. It seems to me that this model works rather than the patron model (Charles Arts).*

Whilst acknowledging that some academics view networking as having some 'political' connotations, Alan, Peter and Charles adamantly insisted that their networking activities were focused more on discussing intellectual ideas. Alan made this point:

*I still think networking for your papers is more important than networking as a person...I put it on papers, reading other people's papers and sending them comments on the papers. Some people operate in different ways. Some people are very strong net-workers as individuals. I am a maverick in that way (Alan Social).*

Peter and Charles expressed the same views about networking and pointed out the importance of 'substance' in delivering and exchanging intellectual ideas:

*Network your work and find out about others' research rather than talking about politics...the main reason that I network is to discuss similar problems and issues: you have got to have real substance (Peter Science).*



*Some people network without substance. Academics should not spend or invest so much time in knowing people because at the end of the day, you have to deliver your work (Charles Arts).*

### **c. Working in research groups**

Working in research groups provided another opportunity for the academics to learn from others, namely their colleagues as well as their research students. This was commonly practised by academics in the faculty of sciences. Working in research groups enabled the research students and their experienced colleagues such as the postdoctoral students and lecturers to exchange ideas, to share and to pass on their skills and experiences of undertaking research experiments. This mutually helpful and caring environment represents the academic socialisation of those working in the field of science (Delamont et al., 2000). Peter and Richard explained how working in a research group enabled them to learn and improve each member's research skills:

*What keeps me going is that I like to think about ideas with young people. It is exciting to work with young people, get results and find something new...In science we always work in groups or in a team...You've got to be selective to have good people in your research group. Identify research grants, interact with members well...try to get people to help each other and create a good working environment (Peter Science).*

*I develop my own research group...In terms of achieving your career objectives by having good quantity and good quality research, I believe you need a research team to enable you to do so much work and progress in your projects. You need 4 to 6 research students to build up your portfolio. You have to develop good research teams...Manage your research team to do research for and with you. Build a team and go for research volume (Richard Science).*

However, Ronald pointed out that working in research groups has now become a common practice even among academics from the faculties of arts and social studies. He described how working in research groups benefits his work:

*I'll be completely lost without my research group. I need a research group especially in my Art and ICT work (Ronald Arts).*

Research groups provided another strand for novice as well as experienced researchers to work together. The research activities involved in this form of collaboration enabled them to share ideas and learn from each other. It is a COP on its own. In short, mentoring, networking, and working in research groups provided the academics in this study with opportunities to make sense of the social and cultural characters of learning and knowing in their work practice (Gherardi and Nicolini, 2002).

#### **5.3.4 Learning through developing new ideas and new structures**

Besides reflecting on previous experiences in order to master the practice, academics also learn through developing new ideas and structures. Trying out new things became another way of learning and progressing in one's career. Instead of merely reacting to everyday work practice, some of the academics described some situations where they took a more proactive stance in their work practice. Three sub-themes emerge from this way of learning; they are: learning through innovating, learning through developing a new research area and learning by connecting theory to practice.



### a. Learning through innovating

Becoming an academic offers an individual the opportunity to participate in various intellectual discourses and develop past and new ideas. Learning how to improve other people's ideas or how to develop new ones becomes one of the academic's everyday work tasks. Innovating promotes continuous learning at work and constant search for knowledge. 'It requires the ability to explore, take risks, create unlikely connections and demands some degree of playfulness' (Wenger, 1998, p. 185). In this study, academics' ability to innovate and discover insightful ideas denotes their mastery of their subject areas that normally brings in rewarding returns in terms of satisfaction and recognition by their peers. This recognition subsequently has an impact upon their career progression. Peter, Richard and Mary shared how academics should be innovative and original in their works:

*You have to be very imaginative, be aware of new areas and come up with good ideas...be very realistic and selective about asking and delivering ideas...Have good judgment and the right intuition (Peter Science).*

*I always see myself as an inventor. I put ideas in a different way and I like to maintain the respect of my peers in my work...I like to produce things, which people have not thought of before and I believe it is the novelty and the newness that gives you the satisfaction (Richard Science).*

*I developed my career through finding a big problem that intrigued me, in which I thought I could contribute something original. I feel sad for those people who never get to identify their question. Set a big question that keeps you going...I chose a very interesting and broad theoretical question, which provides me the drive to keep on studying, teaching, researching and writing. It has preoccupied me for my entire career (Mary Social).*



**b. Learning through developing new research areas: Being one of the early scholars in the subject area in the UK**

Developing a new research area is another form of developing new ideas and new structures in one's field of study. As discussed in Chapter 4, some of the professors in the study described how developing a new research area became one way of mastering their practice as well as gaining access and recognition in their careers. Alan focused on research areas in which little work has been done and emphasised that an academic should thrive by becoming an active participant who continuously contributes to his or her field of study:

*I went into areas which were considered new and where little research was done. I develop a new structure. Becoming an academic is not equal to being a cricketer or a soccer player. You score not as often, but you have to score a very good goal so that it gives impact...I also prefer to work on a topic that not many people are doing. I don't like to follow other people. You do get useful criticism, you bend and you have to accept it. So, write papers and research findings that are influential and give big impact (Alan Social).*

In a similar vein, Mark remarked that being innovative, critical and sceptical about some of the ideas in his field of study motivated him to develop new ways of understanding his subject area:

*In order to succeed in my subject area, I believe that I am supposed to set up a hypothesis and try to demolish it. By being sceptical about perceived wisdom in my subject area, I try to develop new theories. Sometimes, in the course of developing a new theory, you might find a lead to an old problem. You sort of pigeonhole all the existing knowledge into some places and you have to relate them to new problems (Mark Science).*

John's innovation at Royal was to develop a research programme at his department. The programme promoted a strong research culture among his colleagues and simultaneously raised John's reputation as a research leader:

*Not much research was done there. Royal was very much focused on undergraduate teaching. The head of department did not articulate that clearly to me. I introduced the first large-scale research project into the department, although there were some small-scale research projects that were ongoing. I built up the research programme (John Medicine).*

Ronald developed some new ideas to improve the teaching of his subject area. He introduced the use of audio-visual and computer technology to the teaching of arts. He managed to bring forward his idea to his community of scholars and this effort earned him a reputation as an eminent contributor to his field of study:

*The other significant event in my career comes from the frustration of talking in front of the board about space, time and movement. I asked myself why not go and make videos? So, I began my educational videos which gave me the chance to say what I liked...I am also interested in combining technology with arts...Well, my subject area is about moving and interacting...the virtual reality technology is good at communicating ideas. I could see quite quickly that this could be successfully implemented. Not much had been done in this area. I got some publications based on this work and I got grants to go to conferences, to improve the work and I eventually became known for that research area (Ronald Arts).*

Katherine used conferences as a means to introduce her new area to a wider community. She added that developing a new area requires research, writing, and, most importantly, dissemination:

*It is through people's knowledge about your research that you become known at a broader international community and get invited to do things.*



*The key thing is that you must be in an area that is interesting and developing (Katherine Social).*

As discussed earlier, Mary believed that an academic who continuously develops a new area and produces original work actually learns to develop him- or herself as an important player in the field. However, Mark and Charles stated that academics should actually become both players and commentators in their fields of study to ensure that they can contribute as well as learn from each other:

*At the beginning of your career, you think of yourself as a minor player and try to accommodate yourself to the system. In the course of time, you will observe this pattern. Eventually you start becoming aware of the routine policy and hold opinions that also consider the opinions of your colleagues (Mark Science).*

*Academics should actually undertake both roles, meaning a player as well as a commentator...It is a matter of exploring new ways of thinking about my work and how it fits with that of others (Charles Arts).*

To some of the professors, developing a new subject or research area enabled them to further develop their mastery of the practice. Learning through developing a new subject or research area requires a continuous search for new knowledge and adapting their previous experiences into a new context. There were not many British scholars in James and Ronald's fields of study when they began their careers. Being among the UK's early scholars enabled these academics to help establish their respective fields of study. At the same time they helped to shape their academic departments and became the key figures in their respective subject areas in the UK. James and Ronald described their experiences developing their academic disciplines in the UK:



*I had much more freedom because I came to a department which was quite young. So effectively, the beginning of that discipline in this university quite largely followed our initial plan. When I started, my subject area was quite young in the UK...The community in my subject area was quite small at that time. There were not many professors in my subject area in the country. So, it was easier to be known...I was put on more committees inside and outside the university. In certain intellectual committees, national representation is quite important and quite early on I sat on international committees. I became known. That opened up to more opportunities and networking (James Arts).*

*I was lucky in the sense that not many British universities offered my subject area in those days...Back in the 1970s, Warwick was the earliest place to establish a department in my subject area. So there were not many British scholars in this field...I was involved in a department that was developing. I was able to shape the department and to project my interest with the way the department was formed (Ronald Arts).*

Besides examples of self-initiatives, the analysis also suggests some events where social structures facilitate and encourage the academics to establish their subject and research areas. Learning to take advantage of the developing interest in their subject areas also encouraged some academics to adapt and improve their academic practice. The ability to successfully react to the current needs and trends provided a significant learning experience for some academics. The growing interest in the work done by Katherine, Derek and John became a critical point in shaping their careers. Katherine described how she learnt to cope with the increasing interest in her new research area:

*One of the significant events in my career was that Helen got some money to start on a new research area and at the time I was one of her young research assistants. At that time, this research area was considered new to the field. Eventually the research area 'exploded' and became one of the important foci in my discipline. I was at the right place and the right time! Being in the area, I could write quickly. Through the help of my mentors, I began to write books and articles in that particular area and I eventually became one of the subject area's influential figures. I was getting known quickly as one of the early scholars in the subject area...That has been my area ever since (Katherine Social).*

Similarly, the growing interest, and a shift in the focus of the government and policy-makers in Derek's and John's research areas enabled them to react positively and successfully develop their research reputations. Similar to the findings in Halsey and Trow (1971), Trowler (1998) and Henkel (2000), academics' ability to adapt to the expansion and the changing expectations of higher education facilitate their career growth:

*There were some government reforms and the focus eventually moved into my research area. Opportunities for attracting grants came. Publishers were looking for this kind of work. So from being a backwater, people started to have an interest in my research area...anybody working in that field had the opportunity. My research area came to the limelight. I began getting research grants, which later contributed to a lot of publications. A lot of opportunities emerged. This eventually accelerated my academic career (Derek Social).*

*My subject area which used to be young and new 10 and 15 years back, has, at present, been given important attention and I am lucky to be in it. It attracts research funding and it has kept on going over 10 years...It was in fact ahead of the policy and became the leading edge for policy...This subject area attracts major policy makers. It was quite easy to get funding and develop a research team (John Medicine).*

### **c. Learning through connecting theory to practice**

Besides developing past and new ideas, the academics also learnt to master their practice by constantly learning how to connect and link their theoretical understanding to the practical needs of industry, business and community. The contribution that they rendered to the academic and non-academic community gave an impact to their career progression. Richard added that there is always the risk of failure, but without risking something there is no opportunity for him to learn and to contribute to the academia and the public:



*I moved from Border to Warwick because I liked the work environment here. The job gives me, as an academic cum inventor, the opportunities to collaborate with industry... Many prestige inventors patent things that are commercially viable and can be used as an academic output. It is collaboration between academic community and industry... Both industry and academic community recognise this intellectual property. So, it benefits not only the individual inventor but also the university...It is one of the most valuable feelings to be able to contribute (Richard Science).*

As part of connecting theory to practice, Alan learnt to transform his research findings into a more practical output through writing newspaper and magazine columns, participating in radio and television interviews and working closely with the media. He believed that the media provide a link between academics like him to the wider community. John's interest in combining his research and clinical practice provided him with a better understanding of his field of study and its relevance to the community:

*My interest is focused on the mix of both academic work and general practice...when I was at Royal, I carried out 5 surgeries a week and that again combined my practical and research work. [At Warwick], I was still performing surgery, at least 2 surgeries every week because that sustained my clinical work (John Medicine).*

Understanding how to connect theory to practice enabled the academics to learn more about how to relate their academic work to the needs and interest of the general public. Simultaneously they learnt to become more competent academics who master both theoretical and practical aspects of their fields of study. These proactive and creative efforts are coherent with Wenger's 'work of imagination'. Fuller and Unwin (2003) suggest that Wenger's (1998) work of imagination within a COP enables an individual to visualise him- or herself in various contexts and playing various roles.



The themes (1) learning through engaging with ongoing work practice; (2) learning through reflecting on past experiences; (3) learning by developing new ideas and structures; and (4) learning through working with other colleagues, presented in this section, provide a close link to Wenger's suggestion that social participation within the community is the key to learning and mastering the informal and tacit knowledge of one's work practice. The informal learning opportunities provided by the ongoing academic work practice enables the participants to continuously construct their identity and understand the meaning of becoming an academic. From this perspective, learning involves more than the acquisition of codified work-related knowledge. Learning through participation incorporates the constant reproduction of work practice history and the transformation of people's identity (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Gherardi and Nicolini, 2002). Nonetheless, it is undeniable that the processes of continuous learning and engaging with others at work involved some challenges, professionally and personally. The following section discusses some of the challenges faced by the academics in moving through the different stages in their careers.

#### **5.4 Challenges in developing one's career**

Academic socialisation also involves some tensions and challenges. Cawyer et al. (2002) suggests that differences between the expectations and the realities of academic life often affect academics to feel uncertain, anxious, isolated and dissatisfied. Informants in this study were asked to describe some of the challenges that they faced in their academic lives.

Matt said that one of the challenges in his academic career was being asked to develop and establish academic departments both at Santa and Warwick:

*I suppose the major challenge that I can remember is to transform a demoralised and unhappy department into a place which people take considerable pride in and to be associated with it...the department wanted to increase the number of postgraduate students in our area at Santa University. We decided to make it a major effort, and someone had to organise this and that was really my first significant academic organisational responsibility...There is also a challenge to take in postgraduates because some academics have the notion that postgraduate students are distractions...so [the challenge was in] shaping and persuading enough people to change that behaviour...It was quite challenging and in the few years that I was doing it we did manage to increase the number of students. For me, it was a worthwhile achievement (Matt Arts).*

Matt's accounts also indicate another challenge that he faced which was to convince his colleagues about a change that needed to take place in their department. Similarly, one of Alan's challenges in his academic work was to convince his PhD supervisor about his research project. Upon moving into academia, Alan also described the rejections and criticisms that he had faced in publishing his works, and how he had to convince his peers about his ideas. However, these events and challenges taught him about the importance of being critical, assertive and bold as part of becoming an academic:

*My first PhD supervisor did not like my work. I had to get used to that...I did not get a lot of affirmation about my work from my first PhD supervisor. I guess that was because I was quite stubborn as a student...I believe that if you want to be influential in the world of academia, you have to be prepared to accept a lot of criticism (Alan Social).*



Mary recalled an incident that she had with her head of department at Southern University. The challenging situation came as Mary tried to convince him to give her and her colleagues more opportunities to undertake supervisory tasks:

*We had a strange Head of the Department. We were not given any postgraduate teaching and supervision. I disagreed...For me, the Head of Department was rather authoritarian and not rational. He didn't want anybody else except himself to supervise the postgraduate students. I got to a difficult position: I was not trying to claw for power. We were all specialists...It had done nothing good for the postgraduate students. That was why I went to talk to him (Mary Social).*

Likewise, Richard also described how challenging it was to convince his colleagues about his inventions. Nevertheless, he highlighted this as one of the processes one has to face in becoming a more competent academic:

*As a researcher and inventor you've got to become a lateral thinker because it is rather dangerous: you are dealing with your reputation. As an inventor, with little knowledge in that area, your movement is like that of a foolhardy person. You have to accept criticism. In fact, sometimes you are trying not to be laughed at by your peers for your invention. You have to be a bit careful...Your progress is not so much by following what others are doing (Richard Science).*

One of the challenges faced by Derek in his academic career was the little recognition that he and some of his colleagues gained during their early career stage. A growing interest in his research area and the changes in how academia recognises scholarly work made a big impact on Derek's career. Eventually, he began getting more recognition for his work:

*It used to be difficult to get promoted from a lecturer to senior lecturer at universities in those days...Previously, the universities promoted book writers who were considered as scholars, to senior lectureships. People*



*who wrote papers were not considered as serious academics. That was how I think we were seen in those days. Ironically and paradoxically, with the opening of the need for university to generate income and grants, government started asking for evidence of individual work. People who were publishing in journals, books, bringing in research grants and income, having and recruiting postgraduate students, were seen in a rather different kind of light. That gave a great impetus to my career. I was discovered after teaching for 20 years. Instead of going through the normal route from lecturer to senior lecturer, I went from lecturer to reader... To some people, it will be mapped out, but for me, it was not really a smooth transition (Derek Social).*

The challenges that Alan, Mary, Richard and Derek faced in terms of convincing and gaining recognition from their colleagues are consistent with Bourdieu's (1984) ideas of 'the field' and 'playing the game', which can also be linked to Wenger's (1998) idea of generational encounters. According to Wenger, in negotiating one's engagement within one's COPs, one cannot avoid the conflicts and mutual dependencies that result from the encounter between generations. This conflict normally exists because 'different generations bring different perspectives to their encounter because their identities are invested in different moments of that history' (Wenger, 1998, p. 157).

However, despite viewing this generational encounter as a clash between different generations, newcomers and old timers can also learn from each other. To negotiate one's identity in becoming an academic, the newcomer should invest and work towards gaining some access to participate in the history of one's practice (Billett, 2001). 'They must find a place in relation to the past' (Wenger, 1998, p. 157). Similarly, old-timers, instead of limiting their identities to the history of practice, should also improve themselves by learning some new ideas from the newcomers. Alan's descriptions of how he faced rejection and criticism in academia succinctly describe this scenario. His story is coherent

with Wenger's (1998, p.76) suggestion of the 'generational encounters' that exist in a COP:

If what makes a community of practice a community is mutual engagement, then it is a kind of community that does not entail homogeneity. Indeed, what makes engagement in practice possible and productive is as much a matter of diversity as it is a matter of homogeneity...More generally, each participant in a community of practice finds a unique place and gains a unique identity, which is both further integrated and further defined in the course of engagement in practice...Mutual engagement involves not only our competence, but also the competence of others. It draws on what we do and what we know, as well as on our ability to connect meaningfully to what we don't do and what we don't know, that is, to the contributions and knowledge of others. Mutual engagement is inherently partial; yet in the context of shared practice, this partiality is as much a resource as it is a limitation...In fact, it is often useful to belong to both types at once in order to achieve the synergy of the two forms of engagement.

Besides facing the challenge of convincing others in one's academic communities, Peter also considered managing his research groups, and his roles as a researcher, teacher and administrator as challenging:

*You have to remain very optimistic and enthusiastic even when things are not going on well. Sometimes your research doesn't work the way you wanted it to, and you have to try to see it through. Sometimes you may get frustrated with people but you have to keep the research and team going...People move about quite quickly, so you must really manage as it is quite challenging. It is a massive retraining going on...it is basically putting in long hours to enable you to manage the three things efficiently well (Peter Science).*

Managing one's time has become more challenging for these academics. As discussed earlier, John was concerned that his administrative workload would eventually affect his research activities. John realised that he has to manage his time well so that his research reputation did not deteriorate as a result of focusing too much on his administrative



responsibilities. Similarly, James also highlighted the importance of managing his time wisely in order to undertake administrative tasks and at the same time get actively involved in research activities:

*I think it is now immensely more difficult to become a senior university administrator and at the same time do research. I think you have got to decide at some stage how to balance administration and research: how to manage your administrative tasks and then to move back into research. I think being a pure administrator is not enough because a professor should also be a leading figure in his field academically. Generally speaking, I find that I can do administration. However, if I have to give up 50% of my teaching and research to do administration, I am not going to do it (James Arts).*

Some of the challenges which academics in the study repeatedly pointed out were undertaking new tasks at work, convincing their colleagues and peers about their ideas and abilities, and managing their time, especially to do research, teaching and administration. The ability to withstand these challenges helped these individuals developed their academic identities and positioned themselves appropriately within their COPs. Nonetheless, in spite of the challenges that they had to face in their everyday work task, the academics in the study provided stories of successes and failures. They shared some of the strategies that they used to face the challenges in their careers. These coping strategies will be discussed in the following section.

### **5.5 Coping strategies**

Based on his own experience, Alan explained that an academic should develop an ability to accept rejection, criticism and other bad outcomes in moving through his or her career. Alan accepted that other colleagues might be critical of his work and he learnt to



understand that having constructive debates is part of what an academic career is all about. Peter shared the same view when he reflected on his own experience. He insisted that academics should learn to accept criticism, to reflect on their earlier attempts and use these reflections to improve their future efforts:

*You have to forget rejection when you get nasty comments and do another application. You've got to believe in the things that you are doing and be quite resilient. Remain positive when you're rejected and you've got to write many papers and applications. This is the system...I will take the comments, forget about the rejection and work long hours (Peter Science).*

Derek agreed that an academic career requires an individual to share, to challenge and to justify his or her ideas and opinions with other colleagues. He added that one of the most effective strategies to convince others in one's field of study was to continue doing research and to update their understanding of their subject areas:

*I believe that the higher education workplace is becoming more competitive and academics should work smart and keep abreast with the current in their field to sustain recognition in the world of academia (Derek Social).*

As mentioned earlier, Mary insisted that an academic should develop a broad research question in order to cope with the need to be productive and successful in one's career. She stressed that having this broad question enables an individual academic to continuously contribute ideas and works to his or her field of study.

Some of the informants also described how they coped with the challenges of working with others. Peter emphasised that having the right people in his research group and establishing a good working environment are important for his group to prosper and to

remain productive. Similarly, Katherine suggested that it was significant to establish a good and a supportive working environment in order for an academic to excel in his or her career. She believed learning to understand more about one's colleagues and working environment enable an individual academic to cope with the challenges of being an academic.

Ronald highlighted the importance of time management in order for academics to effectively manage their roles as teacher, researcher and administrator. Ronald also emphasised that ultimately, the individuals should spend time wisely on undertaking each role in order to sustain their reputation as competent academics:

*Be very reasonably available to your students, have a high degree of self-discipline and be protective of your time. Publish and go to conferences, despite the fact that now we have little time to do that. Take control of your time and be rigorous in protecting it (Ronald Arts).*

In short, the informants indicated that to cope with the challenges in academia, an academic should continuously update mastery of his or her subject area through research, writing and exchanging ideas at conferences. Academics should also develop an ability to convince and to withstand critics when dealing with other participants in each of their COPs and establish supportive working environments throughout their careers. These strategies were employed by the academics in the study in order to gain and to sustain recognition as eminent scholars in their respective academic disciplines.

## 5.6 Summary of the chapter

This chapter has discussed how the professors in this study underwent their academic induction and socialisation and how learning at work and COPs impacted on their identities and reputation in becoming an academic. These academic induction and socialisation processes were discussed in the light of the literature on professional socialisation, academic careers, organisational learning, and specifically the concept of communities of practice (COPs). There are a number of significant insights that can be drawn from this chapter.

First, the professors in the study learnt to develop their mastery through their participation in everyday work practice. Experiences in the everyday work context played an important role in the construction of their academic identities. Exposure to a variety of social interactions, events and experiences expanded their 'habitus' and 'cultural, symbolic and social capital' (Bourdieu, 1984; Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000; Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2003) or 'career capital' (Arthur et al., 1999; Parker et al., 2004), which significantly facilitated their socialisation process.

Second, an individual academic's COPs (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) such as the invisible college of each subject area; colleagues at the department, faculty and university; professional associations; as well as other people external to academia such as publishers and the media contributed significantly to the construction of one's identity. Active engagement in various COPs enabled the academics to search and discover the informal and tacit processes involved in an academic career. 'The concept of a



community of practice provides the avenue for mutual engagement to integrate and renew the definition of competence and the production of experience' (Wenger, 1998, p. 214).

Academics in this study learnt to negotiate and gained recognition within academia through the use of appropriate 'language' (Vygotsky, 1978) and action determined by the social structures and frameworks of each COP in which they chose to participate. Novices learnt to master their practice by experimenting, listening to and modelling other colleagues' ways of doing things. Responses and feedback from others provided a rich context for the novices to make sense of what it is like to become an academic. This evidence echoes Bloomer and Hodkinson's (2000) findings, which indicate that the transformation of career is a result of an exposure to more diverse forms of social interaction, to new events, to changing circumstances and to the significant turning points. These social interactions provided the learners (academics) with the opportunity to reflect and to construct new meanings on how to participate in their various COPs. Subsequently, the reflection and construction developed the 'learning career' (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000) and the 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1984) of each individual academic. Learning through participation played an important part of mastering one's professional practice. Membership in various COPs provided them with an 'intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge, not least because it provides the interpretive support necessary for making sense of its heritage' (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 98).

Findings from this chapter established that a COP provides novices with access to both competence and the experience of becoming an academic. Through mentoring,

networking and working in research groups, each COP offers access to novices and the more experienced members to reappraise their competence and experience through three dimensions of competence, namely 'mutuality of engagement, accountability to the enterprise and negotiability of the repertoire' (Wenger, 1998, pp. 152-153).

These three dimensions, which are practised through gaining access to full participation and maintaining continuous recognition in one's academic career, improved the academics' career competencies: namely, knowing why, knowing how and knowing whom. According to Arthur et al. (1999, p. 122):

Knowing-why competencies are concerned with issues of personal identity and meaning. Knowing why competencies provide the motivational energy on which the individual's efforts are based....Knowing-how competencies encompass the skills and understanding people accumulate through their work and education. These knowing how skills frequently develop through and become embedded in, the technical and managerial 'know how' of employing companies....Knowing-whom competencies are not just abilities to relate to others and to develop contacts but also the networks of people, and reputation with other people, which are built up as the career progresses. These knowing whom competencies connect with change, and are changed by the networks in which the career actor participates.

Parker et al. (2004, p. 494) connect these three career competencies to the three dimensions through which each COP functions. They state that:

The dimension of joint enterprise reflects the sense of shared mission or purpose behind a community's activities, and can be seen as engaging with individual member's 'knowing why' career competency. The dimension of a 'shared repertoire', of routines and ways of doing things or mastery of practice and/or expertise, can similarly be interpreted as bringing in members' 'knowing how' career competency. The dimension of 'mutual engagement' reflects the interactions among community members, and can be seen as tied to members' 'knowing whom' career

competency. Moreover, Wenger (1998) represents the three dimensions as being interdependent with one another, paralleling the interdependence among the three ways of knowing.

The analysis in this chapter indicated that the informants acquired these three career competencies through active participation within their various COPs. Providing oneself with a rich context for academic development is indeed one key to the success of these academics.

Becoming an academic and moving on in academia involves entering, coming to know and participating actively in the various COPs offered by academic work. An important lesson of this chapter is that the link between a COP and the construction of identity offers an interesting perspective on viewing an academic career as a form of situated, lifelong learning. The next chapter will further discuss how the professors make sense of their roles as academics and use their personal agency to learn within the social structures formed by their COPs, a dynamic process that simultaneously facilitates the construction of one's academic identity.



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## **CHAPTER 6**

# **Academic Identity: The Meaning of Becoming an Academic and/or a Professor**

### **6.0 Introduction**

The main aim of this study is to explore the experiences of academics at different stages in their careers. The previous chapter largely uses career theory to explore how academics experienced induction and socialisation processes in relation to the literature on career, professional socialisation, academic careers, learning at work, and specifically to the concept of communities of practice (COPs). Chapter Five describes how professorial careers are practically developed. Using the concept of identity and focussing on the professors' individual sense making, Chapter Six primarily seeks to convey what becoming an academic and/or a professor means.

It is understood that identity construction in social sciences is complex and contested. According to Henkel (2000, p.16), 'identity is represented as a social as well as an individual construct'. We are partly guided and responsible for what we are though we are not fully in control of the changing circumstances surrounding us. This also particularly echoes Griffiths (1995, p. 93) who suggests that 'identity is a kind of web...the individual can only exist through the various communities of which she is a member and, indeed, is continually in a process of construction by those communities'. The analysis in this chapter, therefore, centres on the process of identity transformation

experienced by the academics in the study. Having this in mind, I have arranged my discussion and analysis in the following sections:

- Academic identity: What does it mean to become an academic and/or a professor?
- How does academic identity get constructed?
- Informants' perceptions towards the implementation of continuing professional development in academia

As can be seen, this chapter is organised in terms of investigating how the academics in the study make sense, negotiate and construct their identities as academics. The inclusion of the final section is to offer the informants' perceptions towards continuing professional development (CPD) in academia. Each of these sections will now be discussed and analysed in turn. Some conclusions are then offered at the end of the chapter.

### **6.1 Academic identity: What does it mean to become an academic and/or a professor?**

The aim of this section is to discuss and explore the important issues highlighted by the academics in the study: how they make sense of their job title, their roles and responsibilities as an academic and/or a professor. My suggestion in this section is that the statement 'being a professor simply involves continuing to do more or less what one had previously done' (Tight, 2002, p. 16) does not provide sufficient explanation for an academic 'to find some way of being who and what [he or she] want[s] to be' (Sikes and Everington, 2004, p. 22) within academia. An exploration on the meaning of becoming a professor might provide empirical evidence to complement the list of the general criteria

normally used by universities in considering an academic to be promoted to a professorship. It should be noted that the term 'professor' used in my study refers to a more classified title used in the British and Malaysian higher education context and not the more open American appointment, which also applies to a lecturer.

The professors in this study were asked to explain how they make sense of their job title as a professor. Mary and Mark gave the following explanations:

*On becoming a reader and eventually a professor here at Warwick, I think there is no difference from becoming an academic. It is very much the same with one exception. Being a professor means you have to show leadership. You are placed on important committees. That is the only major difference (Mary Social).*

*I do not think there is any difference between being a professor and a lecturer. However, inevitably some people's work will be leading the way, for example, in terms of research...I think I have this kind of leading function (Mark Science).*

These accounts are consistent with Tight's (2002, p. 30) conclusion that although the average professors' work roles and responsibilities seem generally similar to their average non-professorial colleagues, they are still expected to provide 'additional leadership responsibilities in research, scholarship, teaching, publication and/or management at departmental, institutional, national and/or international levels.'

To gain a greater understanding of how they make sense of these additional leadership responsibilities, the academics in the study were asked to share what is it like to become a professor, what their roles are as professors, what are the scholarly qualities they felt academics should possess, and what they are aiming for in their academic careers.



### 6.1.1 What it is like to become a professor?

In their answers, Matt and John explained that for them, becoming a professor means hard work and responsibilities in building up their academic communities within and outside academia. Matt and John also talked about working across a range of areas of academic activities:

*I believe being a professor means hard work because you have got responsibility for yourself, your colleagues and the community in and outside the university...I believe that a good professor works very hard across a range of areas of academic activities (Matt Arts).*

John associated his professorship title to a sign of recognition and seniority:

*The other part is that alongside that recognition, one is taking more responsibilities within the university. A lot of activities might be within one's department or faculty or the university as a whole. So it is a measure of seniority, really, within the academic community that one is working within (John Medicine).*

When asked to elaborate what they meant by hard work and responsibilities, my research informants further explained their roles and responsibilities as a professor in the British context. Based on the academics' descriptions gained from the interviews and my reading of existing literature like Richards (1997) and Tight (2002), I manage to list down the professorial roles and responsibilities. They include:

- becoming a broad-minded figurehead.
- becoming an authority, an eminent scholar and a specialist in one's subject area.
- providing leadership in research and teaching.

- becoming a role model and a mentor who helps to build up academic communities through writing, supervising research students, external examining, refereeing, organising conference and serving in editorial boards.
- becoming an academic manager who represents the department and the university, and tries to influence the work and direction of these institutions nationally and internationally.

- **Becoming a broad-minded figurehead**

Matt and Richard added that for them, their professorial title denotes becoming a figurehead whose thinking in his or her subject area is much broader. This broad-minded thinking enabled them to help other staff to develop their research and teaching:

*Professors tended to teach, to do the general broad-ranging things whereas junior colleagues do the more specialised ... And that was part of the career development...in the last few years I tend to help others with their research grant applications. A professor can be a figurehead, so, you are the front person (Matt Arts).*

*As a professor and even as an academic, you are expected to be a subject specialist and also broad-minded...You profess your subject area. The volume of work and the level has to be sustained at a high level...your thinking is more wide-ranging (Richard Science).*

- **Becoming an authority, an eminent scholar and a specialist in one's subject area**

Richard's comment about being a subject specialist supplemented the remarks made by Matt, John, James and Derek who believed that becoming a professor denotes a sign of recognition for their 'achievement' (Taylor, 1999) in their subject areas. Matt, John and James also felt that a professorial title develops their sense of confidence in their scholarly work:



*Well, it is a sign of confidence that you have got this title, and you have reached the top and you become confident with what you have done...it means that you are recognised as a significant researcher, probably a teacher, and possibly a grant getter (Matt Arts).*

*I suppose it is natural and it is part of a career pathway... it is one way of seeing one's career develops in terms of moving from lecturer to senior lecturer, reader and then to professor. It is recognition of one's academic achievement (John Medicine).*

*Becoming a professor means having some self-confidence in your intellectual ability (James Arts).*

Besides gaining self-confidence and competence as an academic, Derek and James commented that the professorial title indicates a sign of professional recognition by colleagues or peers on their expertise and authority in their respective subject areas:

*On becoming a professor, I believe that it denotes recognition by peers and recognition by the academic system. You are respected for your expertise in the field. It is an achievement, a status and it denotes seniority...You are recognised as an expert in your field by your peers nationally and internationally... The professor has a wider function, being an authority to speak broadly on his or her field of study (Derek Social).*

*I think you have the feeling that the academy has judged you to reach a certain standard for recognition. A professor has to be an authority in the discipline (James Arts).*

Peter believed that becoming a professor means that one is recognised as an eminent scholar. However, Peter and Mary added that above all, the title is not the ultimate goal in their careers. Instead, it drives them to carry out more research and teaching in their subject areas:

*For me, becoming a professor means that you are being recognised through your achievement and your eminence in a certain field in terms of*



*research. It is whether or not you have reached a certain level...the professorship is not the end: it is the means to succeed (Peter Science).*

*Don't stop just because you have been promoted. The title is secondary...For me, the professorship is not the ultimate goal...The things that keep me going are the ideas...I will never stop contributing (Mary Social).*

- **Providing leadership in research and teaching and becoming a role model or a mentor who helps to build up academic communities**

Alongside the recognition for authority in their respective fields, most of the professors felt that a professorship also requires them to provide leadership in the research and teaching in their subject area. Peter gave some examples of how he performed his leadership responsibilities:

*Becoming a professor means you've got to have and keep on reaching certain eminence and provide leadership in the field within and outside university. You organise conferences, chair advisory committees, chair research councils and participate in international societies (Peter Science).*

As a professor of science, whose culture of academic discipline encourages the establishment of strong research groups or research laboratories (Delamont et al., 2000), Richard's leading roles involved sustaining the research output of his group and laboratories:

*As a professor you are expected to function as an all-rounder, and manage and lead your team and the discipline into a new area (Richard Science).*

As for Ronald, Derek and Katherine, being subject leaders enabled them to build up their academic communities through helping their peers' scholarly work and becoming a role model for their younger colleagues:

*On becoming a professor: I work towards providing some leadership, being an example, establishing my own work and communicating learning. It is part of being a good citizen in the communities of scholarship and helping the younger ones in developing their careers (Ronald Arts).*

*It also denotes a leadership and administrative role. You provide some leadership in your field and in your department, in bringing in younger staff, in inspiring your colleagues and in encouraging them to develop (Derek Social).*

*On becoming a professor: I think one should be a leader in one's subject, sorting out administrative jobs, writing work that has a big impact and getting research grants to develop your research area...You should also build the institution that you are working in through mentoring junior colleagues and building up research teams (Katherine Social).*

As can be seen in these quotes, Ronald, Derek and Katherine interestingly present their responsibilities as a member of various professional communities. This scenario is consistent with the concept of COPs discussed throughout this thesis. Their leading roles involve developing other colleagues, especially the young ones, and sustaining their professional communities. They constantly engage and reappraise each member's competence and experience through shared academic work practice. This constant engagement was revealingly highlighted by Peter who viewed professorship as not his ultimate career goal but as a means or a 'licence' to continue with one's scholarly work. The professors' comments on helping, inspiring and encouraging their younger colleagues echo Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of legitimate peripheral participation



in which novices and experienced members help each other in reappraising and developing their mastery of the shared practice.

- **Becoming an academic manager who represents the department and the university**

Matt and James felt that becoming a professor also denotes taking more administrative and managerial responsibilities. As academic managers, professors constantly work towards developing their academic departments and university to become nationally and internationally renowned. Although finding some satisfaction in assuming these responsibilities, Matt revealingly commented how his identity as an academic manager forced him to “sacrifice” a certain part of his career in order to perform the social obligation:

*You also need a certain number of professors who are not only good administrators but also prepared to sacrifice certain aspects of their careers in order to provide the departmental or faculty leadership...there are [those] who accept that there is an obligation to provide faculty leadership and that becoming a professor involves securing other people's promotion through lectureship, senior lectureship, readership, etc. (Matt Arts).*

As highlighted in Henkel (2000) and Tight (2002), becoming an academic manager has become another identity commonly associated with a professorial title. However, although being an academic manager has now become part of his professorial roles and responsibilities, James emphasised that a professor should still provide some form of leadership in the teaching and research of his or her subject area:



*Professorship used to mark a distinguished scholar. However now it also refers to a senior academic manager. Clearly, there are different standards between different institutions but nonetheless, academics should aim for keeping the respect of one's discipline, one's colleagues and to make sure that they recognise and respect your work (James Arts).*

For James, a professor should sustain his disciplinary identity regardless of the additional roles he or she has to undertake. This is consistent with Henkel's (2000) suggestion that being an academic manager generally demands the individual to integrate both managerial and academic values in performing his or her roles effectively.

Table 6 on page 241 highlights an emerging picture of varied ways and different meanings attached to becoming a professor. Two informants attached the meaning of a professor to 'becoming a broad-minded figurehead'. Four viewed professorship as 'becoming an academic manager'. Nine informants shared the qualities of 'becoming a role model and a mentor who helps to build up academic communities' and 'providing leadership in research and teaching'. Interestingly, all of the informants have the quality of 'becoming an authority, an eminent scholar and a specialist in one's subject area'. There is also an emerging pattern seen connecting the meaning of being a professor to 'becoming an authority, an eminent scholar and a specialist in one's subject area' to 'providing leadership in research and teaching' and to 'becoming a role model and a mentor who helps to build up academic communities'. From there I gather that becoming an authority, an eminent scholar and a specialist in one's subject area enable them to provide leadership in research and teaching and in the long run, they become role models and mentors who build up the academic communities where they belong to. The list of qualities against each of the sample population is provided in the following page:

Table 6: A tabular representation of the weighting of each of the qualities against each of the sample population.

Professors	James Arts	Ronald Arts	Matt Arts	Charles Arts	John Medicine	Mark Science	Peter Science	Richard Science	Mary Social	Katherine Social	Alan Social	Derek Social
Roles and Responsibilities												
Becoming a broad-minded figurehead			*					*				
Becoming an authority, an eminent scholar and a specialist in one's subject area	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Providing leadership in research and teaching	*	*			*	*	*	*	*	*		*
Becoming a role model and a mentor who helps to build up academic communities	*	*	*		*		*	*	*	*		*
Becoming an academic manager who represents the department and the university	*		*		*					*		

### 6.1.2 Informants' views of a successful academic

Based on their own experiences, the professors were asked about the scholarly qualities that they felt an individual should have in becoming a successful academic. In their answers, I obtained some interesting characteristics that describe a successful academic. The informants agreed that the criteria which facilitated their career success include:

- creativity, imagination and intellectual curiosity.
- ambition and continuous search for opportunities.
- determination and perseverance.

- **Creativity, imagination and intellectual curiosity**

Mary and Ronald felt that being intellectually curious and creative were some of the criteria that enable an individual to become a successful academic. Mary insisted on originality in one's scholarly work:

*Creativity: it doesn't matter how many publications you produce...do something original! (Mary Social).*

*I think a little bit of craziness and curiosity in the search for knowledge...touch of a genius...They've got to believe that the work is worth doing (Ronald Arts).*

Ronald was quite clear about being intellectually curious but commented that an academic should also sustain interest and commitment in his or her work.

- **Ambition and continuous search for opportunities**



In sustaining and having a strong engagement with their work, Richard and Peter stressed the importance of being ambitious and actively seeking for opportunities in order to successfully carry out their academic and research projects:

*To become a professor you've got to have certain skills... you have to be both incredibly ambitious and incredibly clever but at the same time you do need opportunities (Richard Science).*

*You have to be very imaginative and come out with good ideas...At the same time be very realistic about asking and delivering ideas. Work hard, remain enthusiastic, seize opportunities as they come along...and do your work well (Peter Science).*

- **Determination and perseverance**

In a similar vein, Ronald and Mary also expressed that a successful academic should possess strong determination and perseverance in undertaking their scholarly work. By demonstrating these two characteristics, an academic would be able to demonstrate scholarly abilities and convince others of his or her intellectual ideas:

*Of course basic intelligence, determination, degree of application, stubbornness, selfishness, generosity and the ability to communicate, fuel and tell people about their interesting ideas...As a professor, because you profess, you demonstrate these (Ronald Arts).*

*Enjoy doing that...You have to be in love with what you are doing. It is about perseverance (Mary Social).*

The criteria presented in the previous interview extracts are coherent with the recommendations made by Glassick et al. (1997), who listed integrity, perseverance and courage as qualities required of a successful academic. Sustaining one's scholarship involves developing oneself academically and at the same time being able to apply and relate one's work to that of one's colleagues (Glassick et al., 1997; Henkel, 2000; Kogan,

2000). In relation to the criteria that demonstrate good scholarship, the next section discusses what the professors want to achieve in their careers. Their career goals need to be discussed for their relevance to good scholarship and the identity that the academics in the study continuously construct throughout their careers.

### **6.1.3 The quest: What do the professors want to achieve in their careers?**

The academics in the study were asked about what they want to achieve in their academic careers. Most of them listed the following as their career goals:

- Striving for originality and developing new ways of thinking.
- Providing significant contribution to their subject area.
- Developing academic institutions.

#### **• Striving for originality and developing new ways of thinking**

According to Alan and Charles, their career goals are focused on producing original work and introducing new ways of researching and teaching their subject areas. Alan put his career aims in this way:

*I wanted to have some original ideas, to leave my mark on the world and to leave an intellectual legacy, something creative. You have to become known as a person who pushes the thought (Alan Social).*

Like Alan, one of Charles's career goals is to produce innovative work that is distinctively good and yet highly relevant and applicable to the work of his colleagues:

*It is a matter of exploring new ways of thinking about my work and how it fits with that of others (Charles Arts).*

- **Providing significant contribution to their subject area**

Besides striving for originality in their work, some of the academics in the study stressed the importance of providing significant contribution to their subject area. John commented on his continuous hope and career objective which is to become an active contributor to his academic community and the public at large:

*What keeps me going is the hope that my research will continue to provide significant impact on the health services nationally and internationally (John Medicine).*

Like John, James and Ronald emphasised that their academic career endeavours are centred on developing their academic disciplines and the COPs to which they belong:

*My aim would be to take on the development of my subject area and to help other people to think clearly and critically about my particular branch of knowledge (James Arts).*

*What keeps me going is the wish and the desire that I can continue to do the things that I do well, which is to better myself, my discipline, the other scholars in my field and the students that I work with (Ronald Arts).*

For Katherine and Richard, what they want to achieve as an academic is to produce work that would gain constant recognition and respect from their invisible college, that is, their colleagues around the world:

*What I want to achieve in my career is that I want my work to be recognised and I want them to shape the discipline. I will continue doing good teaching and sponsoring students. I also hope that I can continue writing some work that can convince others (Katherine Social).*



*What I want to achieve as a professor is the continuation of recognition for my expertise and my work by my peers and colleagues around the world. I want to leave a kind of mark in my field of specialisation (Richard Science).*

- **Developing academic institutions**

Matt, who insisted that universities should also be run by academics, commented on the satisfaction that he gained from using his experience and expertise to improve university administration. Matt seemed to enjoy the managerial aspect of his professorial roles and responsibilities, and developing a strong academic institution has become one of his quests as an academic:

*Contributing to the leadership of the university is something that is enjoyable, and our capacity to influence national debates is something that keeps me going. I regard it as something that needs to be done (Matt Arts).*

#### **6.1.4 Informants' meanings of becoming an academic and/or a professor**

All in all, the academics in the study gave illustrative accounts about their roles and responsibilities as a professor, which, to some extent, are also played by average non-professorial academics. The roles and responsibilities highlighted - becoming a broad-minded figurehead, an authority, an eminent scholar, a specialist in one's subject area, a leader in research and teaching, a role model and a mentor who helps to build up academic communities, an academic manager who continuously develops his or her department and university - reflect the identities that these academics have continuously negotiated throughout the different stages in their careers.

Having some of the scholarly qualities such as determination, perseverance, ambition, creativity, imagination and curiosity enabled them to achieve their goals in their academic careers. Their goals as academics are centred on providing new ideas or ways to improve their subject areas. They continuously look for originality in their work. However, despite the emphasis on originality, the informants also realised that their contributions should be related to the work of others in their respective academic disciplines. Academic discipline remains fundamental and significantly influences how academics reconstruct and reshape their identities as researchers, teachers and managers (Delamont et al., 2000; Henkel, 2000; Becher and Trowler, 2001). For them, an academic identity involves one's individual as well as social identities. These findings are consistent with suggestions made by Henkel (2000) and Kogan (2000) on the key concepts of an academic identity. Using a communitarian conceptual framework, Henkel suggests that an academic is both a distinctive and an embedded individual. She further recommends that:

The concepts of distinctiveness and embeddedness can be understood as compatible, indeed mutually reinforcing, within communitarian philosophies. Identity is thus represented as a social as well as an individual construct. (Henkel, 2000, p. 16)

Kogan, who extended and supplemented Henkel's key concepts of academic identity, concludes that:

People (academics) are stronger not only because of their expertise and their own moral and conceptual frameworks, but also by performing a range of roles, which are strongly determined by the communities and institutions of which they are members. (Kogan, 2000, p. 210)

These recommendations, made by Henkel (2000) and Kogan (2000), accord with my primary argument in this thesis, which suggests that a successful academic career relies on both one's academic and pedagogic qualifications and also one's ability to socialise within the various COPs that one participates in. It is against this background that I profoundly support Trowler and Knight's (2000) findings which recommend academics to learn the informal and tacit knowledge practised within their COPs as part of their academic induction and socialisation processes.

In the course of this section, I have discussed a number of themes taken from the informants which showed how they make sense of their individual and social identities as academics. My aim in this study was not to suggest that there is one, singular way of becoming a professor. What I would like to suggest is that each individual academic in this study, with different characteristics and from different academic disciplines, and working within various COPs, creatively learnt to develop their professional judgment of a successful academic and competently negotiated their identities in their own unique ways.

However, little is known about how these informants developed this judgment and how academic identity gets constructed. To what extent does the individual play the roles which are strongly determined by the communities and institutions of which they are members, and to what extent do they have the agency to negotiate their own career path? The following section explores how the social structures formed by the culture of one's



academic disciplines, one's COPs and institutions interact with one's individual agency, and how this interaction shapes and constructs one's academic identity.

## **6.2 Academic identity: How does it get constructed?**

(insert Morwenna Griffiths and Henkel) Little is known about the ways in which academics negotiate the gap between social expectations and their subjective experiences, and the sorts of identities they construct for themselves. The following sections discuss and analyse how the informants' experiences facilitated their identity construction.

### **6.2.1 Learning to play the game, role-playing and personifying**

The professors in the study were asked to comment on how they felt about the influence of social structures and how they used their personal agency to develop their academic identities. The informants stated that success in career and identity construction depend on one's ability to gain access to participate in more complex activities. Success in gaining access involves a constant interaction between their self-directed efforts and the social structures provided by the various COPs in which they participated. Their continuous reconstruction of academic identity resonates with Giddens's (1991) notion of 'the reflexive project of the self'. Academic identity construction involves 'the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised biographical narratives' (Giddens, 1991, p. 5).

#### **a. Learning to play the game**

The informants' accounts illustrate the importance of 'learning to play the game' which involves the ability to understand the social structures formed by the systems and the

culture of one's COPs. John and Peter believed that their ability to understand and to conform to the organisational culture and system formed within their social structures significantly facilitated their career advancement:

*I guess people who tend to succeed are going to be people who understand the wider system and how to play it to their advantage. You have to play within the rules if you are working in the university. This is because you can push the rules, you can stretch the rules, but you have to stay within the rules because otherwise, the organisation sooner or later will come down on you (John Medicine).*

*Understanding the organisational culture is very important in your career. You must know where you fit in the organisation... You've got to go your own way to be original but you have to fit in with various levels as well (Peter Science).*

John's reference to "come down on you" strikingly suggests that playing the game also requires one to recognise the power difference that encircles the communities that one participates in. His comment echoes Bourdieu's (1993) metaphor of viewing socialisation as a game circling around 'unequal relations of power' (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 42). In the context of this study, Bourdieu's concept of 'the game' is formed from his notion of the academic profession as a 'field' and 'habitus' as the sense of what it is to be an academic. In a similar vein, Katherine and Mark explained how the feedback of their colleagues enabled them to become aware of both explicit and tacit 'rules of the game' and the 'habitus' and to learn how to conform to the organisational culture and systems in place:

*It is important to fit in the workplace as each place has its own system. It is very important indeed to learn about your new colleagues, the work culture and the quality standard of the university. You have to understand*

*the organisational culture in order to fit in with the people that are doing the work. What I did was to be flexible (Katherine Social).*

*There is a strong culture in our subject area...We are formed by the culture; we will be aware of new developments in our area. I do believe that our personality throughout our careers will be formed by the feedback of our colleagues (Mark Science).*

Furthermore, instead of looking at the individual academics as totally passive and rule-following participants trying to understand and to conform to the organisational culture and system, some informants highlighted the elements of role-playing and personifying, which suggest some forms of individual agency. They suggested that each individual should be viewed as bringing in his or her own biography and learning to improve and to adapt to the culture and the system that they participate in. For them, Bourdieu's (1993) concept of 'playing the game' should not be viewed as simply following the rules and becoming a player. Instead, the idea of 'playing the game' should acknowledge some space for individual agency and they viewed it as building up a sense of how to become a 'better' player.

#### **b. Role-playing and personifying**

Mary felt that successful academics negotiate the access to gain academic recognition throughout their careers by performing some forms of effective role-playing and personifying:

*You are your own life project because, otherwise, you treat yourself as a puppet of the social forces. In understanding organisational culture in my career, I believe that it is not an object outside. We make the culture. You get to know the scene. You are a player. You bring in your culture. It is up to you to make your role, not merely taking the role. I always see myself as*



*an explorer in my career...there is no grand design...Everything was not scripted... So, I would like to use the concept of academics engaged in role-playing. If not, academics would be robots...Academic career can be viewed as an academic theatre. We have the general script but it is up to the career actors to play the roles successfully (Mary Social).*

Mary believed that an academic should play within the rules formed within academia. For her, an academic has the opportunity to manage and to relate one's contribution to his or her subject area, "Play within the rules...the structure is both [a] constraining and enabling agency" (Mary Social). She agreed that despite the need for one's work to be recognised by the social system in academia, academics should try to produce materials that are original and related to their subject areas. She expressed her disappointment with some academics who preferred to replicate the work of others for the sake of gaining promotion in the academic rank, "It is sad if your ultimate concern is to justify your promotion to the academic registrar" (Mary Social).

Like Mary, Richard felt that an academic should continuously adapt as the rules for progressing in one's academic career evolve according to the needs of the academic discipline and its wider environment, like government, business, industry and society:

*You have your target and you have the rules to follow and the games to play...I believe that in academic life, the rules are not too strict and regimented. You have the freedom to chart your career... the rules change as the working environment evolves and changes. Work your way through it. You've got to find out, absorb and adapt (Richard Science).*

Alan felt that his identity work is dominantly influenced by his self-agency to build his career as an influential scholar: for instance going to the US and having close working relationships with the media. He used social structures to help him achieve his aim:

*I don't think that I am being moulded very much by the structure of the organisation. Of course I have to work within the framework...I could not change the rules but I have to work within the rules. However the rules are not so binding and there is a fair bit of flexibility so that you can build your career in different ways...I very consciously chose ways to succeed within the structures imposed by British academia...I knew that to get to the top in Britain or the world, I had to get some US experience: it gives an insight on a new way of thinking...We all have to work within the rules for promotion and academic success (Alan Social).*

Alan also stressed the need for academics to invest and contribute to a new structure or a new way of doing their subject area as part of becoming influential scholars. Building a new structure requires one to be able to “upset” or “threaten” one’s colleagues, including the seniors, and to accept a lot of criticism for these actions. He disagreed with the notion that young researchers and scholars succeed merely because some seniors helped them. Alan believed that ultimately, one has to work towards becoming known for a person who “pushes the thought”. Using an analogy of a football player, Alan emphasised that a successful academic is not judged by how many “scores” he or she made. “You score not as often, but you must score a very good goal so that it gives an impact” (Alan Social).

James felt that despite the structures that may exist in an academic discipline, academics should also continuously provide new ideas and new ways into the research and teaching of a subject area:

*Based on my experience, the academy forms you and conditions your career only to a certain extent. This is because if you are lucky, you can change the place where you do it or you can change your discipline...I would not like the concept of career to change from a metaphor into a map...I think the element of choice comes in (James Arts).*

In a similar vein, Mark explained the need for academics to negotiate access into their communities of scholars and gradually learn to 'play the game' and position themselves appropriately within their COPs:

*At the beginning of your career, you think of yourself as a minor player and try to accommodate yourself to the system. In the course of time, you will observe this pattern. Eventually, you start becoming aware of the routine policy and hold opinions that also consider the opinions of your colleagues. You will make deductions that these are the rules of the game and this is how to play. A scientist is a person who can solve problems, not the guy who can only read out other people's ways or solutions (Mark Science).*

The informants believed that novices who continuously seek to master the rules of the game as early as possible would be able to position themselves as full participants in the various COPs to which they belong. They acknowledged that an academic should invest his or her time understanding the social structures formed within academia but ultimately must use individual initiative to be able to position his- or herself within the various COPs. Learning to play the game, role-playing and personifying, as taken from the informants' own words, represent their continuous struggles for positioning in academic life. This reflects Bourdieu's (1988, p. 11) suggestion that:

*The university field is, like any other field, the locus of struggle to determine the conditions and criteria of legitimate membership.*

The informants' accounts have revealed how they developed their professional judgment and constructed their academic identities. This was done by 'playing within the rules of the game' rather than 'totally following the rules of the game'. Thus, instead of merely



playing the roles which are strongly determined by the communities and institutions of which they are members, the informants highlighted some examples where they used their individual agency to negotiate their own career path.

The informants' revelations reflect two forms of activities which have facilitated their career advancement: academic socialisation and identity construction. The following section explores how these activities, which I describe as 'self-designed apprenticeship' (Arthur et al., 1999) and 'guided learning through work' (Billett, 2002), assisted their movement in academia.

### **6.2.2 Self-designed apprenticeship and guided learning through work**

In this section I will use the collection of informants' career stories described in Chapter 4 to highlight some examples of their self-designed apprenticeship and experiences of guided learning through work.

#### **a. Self-designed apprenticeship**

Self-designed apprenticeship is a term used by Arthur et al. (1999) to refer to an apprenticeship that is informally designed by an individual career actor. Instead of fulfilling the learning objectives formally set by institutions, self-designed apprenticeship enables the individual to use his or her career interests and select what, how and with whom they would like to learn and develop their skills, competencies and their identities. In self-designed apprenticeship, an individual apprentice uses his or her inquisitiveness

and accumulates learning experiences through moving across places and appointments at different stages in his or her career (Arthur et al., 1999).

In analysing how self-designed apprenticeship facilitates the informants' construction of academic identity, I have identified 3 key life events highlighted by the informants. The key life events were: undertaking research fellowships and visiting scholarships, moving between institutions and developing new ideas about research and teaching.

First, the decision to undertake research fellowships and visiting scholarships either in the UK or abroad enabled some of the informants such as Alan, Charles, James, Mark and Peter to transform their academic identities and to improve their mastery of academic work practice. Their career stories reveal how these experiences enabled them to contribute on a wider scale and eventually developed their identities as internationally renowned key figures in their fields of study. Second, the drive to succeed also encouraged a number of informants to make important decisions of moving from one institution to another. As depicted in their career stories, Charles, James, John, Katherine, Mary, and Matt made the move between institutions as part of gaining new experiences instead of simply getting a better job. Third, another key example of how self-designed apprenticeship facilitated the informants' career advancement and reconstruction of identity was through their development of new ideas about their research and teaching. Alan's close working relationship with the media, John's achievement in developing a strong research culture among medical academics at Royal and Warwick, and Ronald's

innovative effort of combining technology with arts demonstrated how their novel ideas accelerated their careers and transformed their academic identities.

#### **b. Guided learning through work**

Guided learning through work is a term used by Billett (2002) to refer to how social structures such as communities and institutions shape and provide access for individuals to learn and master their everyday work practice. Billett's idea, which is based on a Vygotskian-derived constructivist theory, suggests that individuals' mastery of professional practice is facilitated by their degree of participation and the types of activities that they engage in throughout their working lives. Mentoring and networking are examples of guided learning through work experienced by the informants in this study.

Analysis of the career stories also demonstrates the importance of guided learning through work in facilitating the professors' career advancement and construction of identity. Derek, Katherine, Mary, Mark, Richard and Ronald provided some examples of how their career experiences, especially at the initial stages, developed through some forms of guided participation by their mentors and senior colleagues. Mark and Ronald described their postgraduate experiences with their supervisors to be the key events in shaping their academic development. Derek, Katherine, Mary and Richard told how their mentors and senior colleagues provided the access to grow, to gain some recognition and successfully construct their identities as key figures in their subject areas.



I acknowledge that moving on in academia and one's construction of academic identity has a personal as well as social dimension. Instead of learning through one's self-designed apprenticeship, an individual's ability to participate also depends upon the extent to which communities and institutions grant access to work practices. Billett (2002, p. 27) states that guided learning through work is significant in one's career because 'the knowledge to be learned is historically, culturally and situationally constituted.'

However, it should be pointed out that self-designed apprenticeship and guided learning through work actually overlap and complement each other. The professors in this study were involved in both activities throughout their careers. Closely related to this scenario, Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2003, p. 4) who use the concept of 'habitus' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) to refer to 'an individual's internalised and subconscious disposition that orientates the way he or she acts', suggest that social structures and individual agency complement each other and are almost inseparable.

The academics' accumulated experiences and achievements eventually led them to move across what scholars of the Chicago School of Sociology term as 'a status passage' or 'a change in how one presents oneself to others, a change in how one is treated by others' (Barley, 1989, p. 50). Whilst progressing from lecturer to professor represents the identifiable objective dimension of career, the move between these positions also interconnects with the transformation of each informant's identity and the growing recognition each gains as an academic.

### **6.2.3 Academic identity: A sculpture or a sculptor?**

Using the discussion on self-designed apprenticeship and guided learning through work in the previous section, I also asked the professors whether they viewed themselves as sculptors or sculptures of their academic identities. The sculptor versus sculpture debate has long been closely associated with the literature on career and professional socialisation. Scholars in socialisation literature such as Van Maanen and Schein (1979) regard individuals as more like sculptures: passive, rule following and ready to be shaped by the social structures that revolve around them. However, another school of thought with scholars such as Bell and Staw (1989) views individuals more as proactive agents or sculptors of their career advancement and identity development. In a similar vein, Savickas (2000, p. 59) who views career as becoming ‘more personal and self directed,’ obviously holds that an individual is a sculptor of his or her identity. Developing one’s career is viewed as a lifelong project developed and managed by the individual.

Mary considered herself as a sculptor of her academic identity. For Mary, academic career is an autonomous kind of activity. She viewed academics as innovative individuals. She believed that an academic should work around the rules provided by the social structures to develop his or her identity. John also viewed himself as a sculptor of his career. His experience building up a research program at Royal and Warwick through self-learning supported his view.

However, Katherine, Mark and Richard believed that they were sculptures at the early stage and only became sculptors at their mid- and late career stages. Mark commented that:

*You cannot take on other people's personality. You have to do it yourself...Initially, of course, at the beginning of your career you are shaped by the society and the discipline. However, eventually you will form your own opinions and your own personality and take it on (Mark Science).*

Matt viewed himself as a sculptor when he left the civil service to join the academic profession. However, he also considered himself as a sculpture when he referred to his promotion as one of the university administrators. He suspected that some people at the university administration had already had some plan to train him into becoming an academic administrator.

In short, based on my analysis and previous discussion of the professors' career stories and how they are linked to self-designed apprenticeship and guided learning through work, I strongly believe that individual academics are in fact both sculptors and sculptures of their careers and identities. This finding is consistent with Mutch's (2003) findings which suggest that the best way to resolve this 'sculptor versus sculpture' dispute which actually is derived from the 'agency versus structure' debate, is to stop the 'either/or' argument and highlight the 'both/and' joint interaction embedded within one's COPs. An individual's biography interacts with social structures and he or she undertakes both roles, as a sculptor and a sculpture, simultaneously while moving through different stages in his or her academic career.



### **6.3 Informants' perceptions towards the implementation of continuing professional development in academia**

With the need to improve the quality of the higher education system, the provision of continuing professional development (CPD) activities has become one of higher education institutions' main concerns (Tight, 2003). The growing need for CPD in higher education institutions has encouraged most of them to set up establishments such as centres for academic development, centres for academic practice and other professional advancement units. Literature on CPD, mostly written by academic developers in higher education institutions such as Brew (1995), Webb (1996), Nicholls (2000), Land (2001) and Eggins and Macdonald (2003) contribute some findings and suggestions on ways of carrying out these activities successfully and the issues and challenges involved. However, research findings on CPD derived from the career experiences of the 'receivers' of academic development activities, particularly, the academics themselves, are scant and less developed.

My interest in this study was also to capture my informants' perceptions towards the implementation of CPD in academia. Based on their career experiences, the professors were asked about the extent CPD activities in academia have assisted their career growth.

Matt felt that he has gained a lot from the CPD programme conducted in his institution. The programme provided him with some understanding of how the university works. This experience enabled him to understand the structure, procedures and expectations of the university system and guided him on how he can participate within it. Matt also

believed that his exposure to both formal and informal learning opportunities simultaneously developed his mastery of academic work practice:

*My recommendation would be to engage in career development activities that help you to understand how the university works within the national and international higher education framework...Being aware of any development beyond your narrow discipline...gaining experience in advance by participating in undergraduate and postgraduate faculty meetings, and serving on the faculty board to get a taste of how an academic works, also gradually build up your knowledge (Matt Arts).*

As a professor who also undertakes some managerial responsibilities, Matt attended some formal staff development programmes for senior management organised by his university. The courses provided the opportunities for him and his colleagues to share their experiences. The sharing of experiences provided a better understanding of how he and his colleagues could make use of the resources provided by the higher education system:

*There are, of course, rather formal professional staff development events designed for senior management. And these occasions will open your eyes to the range of problems that might be coming your way when you chair the department...to get you thinking and talking about possible solutions and possibly the courses offered in this university. The events are designed to inform people about the way the university works; what are its aspirations? ...The events are useful because the people can share their common experiences (Matt Arts).*

In terms of the provision of CPD activities in academia, I also relate these efforts to the idea of providing 'strong and weak environments' (Bell and Staw, 1989; Weick, 1996; Arthur et al., 1999) or situations for career development. A strong career environment, for instance, military culture, develops clear and uniform structures and guides for individuals to behave and socialise (Arthur et al., 1999). The individual's unique reaction

is not encouraged by this kind of career environment. In a weak career environment, individual career actors are given more opportunities to become more proactive in their career undertakings. The weak career environment is less prescriptive and encourages individuals to self-direct their learning and action rather than to strictly conform to the requirements or culture of their communities or institutions (Arthur et al., 1999).

I explained the concept of strong and weak career environments to my informants and asked them to relate this idea to the implementation of CPD in academia. Most of the professors showed a preference for a weaker rather than a strong or structured implementation of CPD in academia. Matt suggested that CPD in academia should not be based on a strong career environment. However, he agreed that CPD activities, which continuously assist and support academic to master their work practice, are useful:

*Well, I don't believe in having too strong an environment or in Warwick's case too strong a Centre for Academic Practice...On the other hand, for specific things, there needs to be support from that environment, like e-learning. It is quite a good example if most academics in this university become more aware of the opportunities of e-learning initiatives. There ought to be support like that from the Centre for Academic Practice (Matt Arts).*

Alan also agreed on having CPD activities that are based on a weaker career environment so that academics would still have the freedom to innovate and contribute to their academic disciplines:

*Not structured. In academia there is a set of standards on what is good...let it be ambiguous rather than a very structured. If you are productive and you are a good worker, you are your own insurance (Alan Social).*



Mary and Charles believed that the implementation of CPD in academia should be based on a weaker academic career environment so that its provision is more enabling rather than constraining academics' creativity to develop their identities and advance throughout their careers. Mary was concerned about the tendency of establishing a CPD programme that is based on the technical rational concept in which knowledge is codified, structured and may hinder academics from becoming more innovative in their work:

*The system should remain as weak. The environment should remain weak and encourage proactive academics instead of purely reactive ones...Continuing professional education [provided] by the Centre for Academic Practice cannot move to a stronger environment...I felt sorry for new colleagues. All these people are like hawks wanting to descend and shape them to be a good personal tutor...and teach them how to teach. They tend to be very bureaucratised [and have] the capacity of developing procedures, filling in forms and practices to follow. This is like Max Weber's 'technical rational' (Mary Social).*

Charles highlighted the importance of having CPD activities that are carried out based on a close link between the central institution and each respective academic department. He felt that this synergy will ensure that the content of the CPD programme is relevant and viable with the culture and the practice of each academic discipline:

*I suspect that in Arts we opt for freedom rather than constraint...I go for the more ambiguous...I think I shall go for the weak side...An academic career is multifaceted. There are not many ways that institutional arrangements can cater for the whole individual academic career. Yes, staff development can do for appraisal, teaching practice and other ancillary skills. One of the issues or facets that I notice is that it is often provided as one pill fits all. In practice it works best if it is locally constructed...I think careful thought should be done on what fractions can be effectively supplied centrally. Information on institutional things like research grant application can be very helpful for academics but it cannot impose on my pattern of research. Interest and instrumentation are different across disciplines (Charles Arts).*

Charles added that one of the challenges of implementing CPD in academia would be to ensure that the programme could be flexibly adapted to cater for the different needs of each academic discipline. Similarly to the others, Ronald also stressed that CPD in academia should be treated not as a prescriptive intervention but more as a supporting mechanism so that academics are given sufficient freedom to develop their careers successfully:

*I always believe that people who go into scholarship need a high degree of autonomy in order to express their creativity. They need to be allowed the space and the time to do that (Ronald Arts).*

Whilst acknowledging the benefits gained from the implementation of CPD activities, most of the informants felt that it should be set up in a weaker rather than a structured career environment. A more dynamic and flexible CPD, which links the university central unit with each academic department together, would enable academics to gain more support in undertaking their academic work practice.

#### **6.4 Summary of the chapter**

There are a number of significant lessons that can be drawn from this chapter. First, in making sense of what it means to become an academic and/or a professor, the informants provided a number of meanings by describing the roles and responsibilities that they have played throughout their careers. Their descriptions of the characteristics of successful academics, which include determination, perseverance, ambition, creativity, imagination and curiosity, revealed that there are not many differences in becoming a lecturer, a senior lecturer, a reader or a professor. However, the informants' comments about

becoming a broad-minded figurehead, an authority, a specialist, a subject leader in research and teaching, a role model and a mentor within one's academic communities, and an academic manager who continuously develops one's department and university, reflected a small but significant distinction among the academic rank in the British higher education context. Becoming a professor significantly implies eminence, leadership, authority and reputation within an academic discipline and/or institution (Tight, 2002).

Second, analysis of the professors' career stories suggested that the construction of one's academic identity involves the dynamic interaction between the individual's personal agency and the social structures formed by one's COPs and institutions. Alongside the quest of providing originality in their work, the informants acknowledged that ultimately, their contribution should be well-accepted and recognised by their 'invisible colleges' as well as the public. For them, the construction of an academic identity involved developing one's individual as well as social identities (Taylor, 1999; Henkel, 2000; Kogan, 2000).

I acknowledge that the formation of one's academic identity involves a combination of one's individual project and one's fulfilment of roles, shaped by one's communities and institutions. The academics in this study stressed that the process is not a passive act of being absorbed or moulded by one's academic discipline. Facilitated by one's 'self-designed apprenticeship' (Arthur et al., 1999), and 'guided learning through work' (Billett, 2002), the construction of one's academic identity incorporates an active and reciprocal interaction between an individual's biography (Hodkinson et al., 2004) and the



social structures provided by the various COPs (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) formed within academia.

Developing the right judgment on how to 'play within the rules of the game' set by one's COPs and institutions, has an impact on one's academic identity construction. Playing within the rules of the game connotes replicating or transforming the habitus (Bourdieu, 1988, 1990, 1993) and the 'shared repertoire' (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) of one's COPs and institutions. The ability of academics to position themselves appropriately and to successfully manage the interaction between personal agency and social structure provide a significant impact on their identities and reputation.

Individual academics are both 'sculptors' and 'sculptures' of their academic identities. The interaction and construction are experienced and simultaneously learnt throughout one's career. Academics learn to negotiate and gain recognition within academia through the use of appropriate 'language and action' (Vygotsky, 1978; Gherardi and Nicolini, 2002) suited to the culture of each COP in which they choose to participate. Their active engagement enabled the academics to search and discover the informal and tacit processes involved in various COPs (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Trowler and Knight, 2000). The academics' accumulated experiences and achievement not only involved progressing from a lecturer to a professor but also entailed some transformation and a growing recognition of their academic identities.

Third, I have also discussed and analysed my informant's perceptions towards the implementation of CPD in academia. Through reflecting on their career experiences, the academics in this study acknowledged that the provision of CPD activities in higher education institutions is essential for academics. However, they pointed out that the implementation of CPD should not be too structured and restrictive. Whilst providing some guided learning and expectations to academics, the CPD practices should remain dynamic and flexible so that academics are given sufficient freedom to innovate, to express their creativity and to self-design their career undertakings. An effective CPD in academia should be continuous, reflective, cater for the distinctive needs of each academic discipline and not too generic (Brew, 1995; Malcolm and Zukas, 2000). Brew (1995, p. 11) argues that:

Concentrating too many resources in central staff development units may lead to staff development being viewed as remote from the needs of the staff designed to benefit from it and may concentrate attention on general training rather than being designed to meet the specific needs of departments, individuals and groups.

Similarly, the informants felt that an effective CPD in academia should be based on a collaborative effort between the central academic development agency and each respective academic department. This collaboration would enable academics to experience CPD activities that incorporate the general as well as the discipline-specific inputs. This idea echoes Trowler's (1998) findings which argue that instead of imposing a single, rational, top-down, prescriptive approach towards the management of change in higher education institutions, a more effective effort would be established by considering

and acknowledging the need to relate it to the various disciplinary cultures embedded in each academic department.

In summary, this chapter has illustrated how academic socialisation facilitated the construction of my informants' academic identities. My discussion and analysis suggested that each individual academic in this study, with different characteristics and from different academic disciplines, and working within various COPs, creatively learnt to develop their professional judgment of what constitutes a successful academic and competently developed their identities in their own unique ways. I recognised that becoming an academic involves 'entering and coming to know' (Knight and Trowler, 2000; Tight, 2003), and positioning oneself appropriately within one's COPs formed within academia. This stance reiterates the thesis of this study, which suggests that success in academia relies not only on one's academic and pedagogic qualifications but also one's ability to socialise within the various COPs that one participates in. Although I acknowledge that more research on academic careers is needed, I believed that my small-scale research on professors' career experiences has provided some understanding on academic socialisation. The following chapter will review the key findings of my study and provide some recommendations for practice and areas for further research.



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# CHAPTER 7

## Conclusion

### 7.0 Introduction

The previous chapters have explained the subject of my study, described how it was carried out and discussed what its major findings were. The purpose of this chapter is to bring together the main ideas emerging from this research and to identify the contribution of this study both in practical terms and from the point of view of the literature. Section 1 gives an overview of the study. Section 2 discusses and suggests how the key findings of this research have contributed to the field of study. Sections 3 and 4 provide some recommendations for practice and areas for further research.

### 7.1 Overview of the study

This study was aimed at providing a better understanding of the academic career. It has contributed to the continuing discussion on academic socialisation. Informed by the biographical research tradition, this study explored the career experiences of 12 professors from 12 academic departments at a UK university. The study involved documenting the academics' career stories through a series of in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviewing interviews, documentary analysis and a literature review.

This study was aimed at exploring and analysing the career stories of academics as they progressed throughout their careers. The research set out to determine how the academics in the study reflexively constructed their academic identities. Based on the Chicago

School of Sociology's concept of career, this study explored both the changes in roles, positions or statuses, and also the transformation of the academic's identity (Goffman, 1961; Becker, 1963; Barley, 1989; Crossan et al., 2003). Using the communities of practice (COPs) (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) model as its conceptual framework, this study has demonstrated how the individual academics' mutual engagement within shared practice or cultural repertoires provides the context for their identity construction. The transformation of their identities as academics was the outcome of active participation in various COPs throughout their careers. Becoming an academic is a constant process entrenched in power relations, ideology and culture within the various COPs that an individual participates in.

## **7.2 Key findings of the study**

The findings of the study have provided some answers to the research questions addressed in Chapter 1:

1. What is the history of how people have come to be professors?
  - a. What is it like to become a professor?
  - b. What does becoming an academic mean to the professors?
2. How does academic identity get constructed: To what extent is academic identity formed as an individual project, to what extent does the individual academic play the roles that are strongly determined by his or her communities and institutions, and to what extent is academic identity a combination of both?

3. How does learning at work impact on the academic's identity and reputation?
  - a. To what extent does formal learning contribute to the construction of academic identity?
  - b. To what extent does informal learning contribute to the construction of academic identity?
4. How do communities of practice (COPs) in academia contribute to the construction of an academic's identity?
5. Based on their career experiences, what are the academics' perceptions towards the implementation of continuing professional development (CPD) in academia?

### **Research Question 1**

My aim in this study was not to suggest that there is one particular way of becoming a professor. My intention was to show various ways of how people have come to be professors. The informants' histories revealed that the process of becoming a professor is not always linear and straightforward. Eight out of 12 informants started as an academic after their postgraduate and postdoctoral studies, two started as a researcher before taking up lecturing jobs, and the other two had some experiences working for the government and industry before moving into academia. The eight individuals who moved straight into an academic job made the decision after being inspired by their lecturers, their colleagues and the subject area while studying as undergraduate and postgraduate students. This



subject devotion also eventually motivated the other four to switch their careers from a researcher, a government officer, and an engineer into becoming academics.

Each individual academic, with different characteristics and from different academic disciplines, working within various COPs, made sense of and successfully negotiated his or her identity in unique ways. However, the findings of the study also revealed that, besides developing their individual identities, the academics also built up their social identities so as to accommodate the cultures and ways determined by the COPs of which they were members. The findings revealed related themes in most of the professors' career stories, particularly in their experiences of becoming a professor. The academics in the study gave illustrative accounts of their duties and goals towards becoming a broad-minded figurehead, an expert or authority in their subject area, a role model and an eminent researcher and scholar. These are the identities that they continuously negotiated throughout the different stages in their careers. Although these findings demonstrate that there is no specific or particular way of becoming a professor, there are recurrent themes about their scholarly qualities found in most of the career stories: determination, integrity, boldness, perseverance, ambition, creativity, imagination, curiosity, originality and contribution to others (Question 1a).

According to the informants, 'becoming an academic' refers to a continuous process of participating and positioning themselves within various COPs in their careers. In becoming an academic, an individual constantly develops his or her anchor, core area or 'conceptual framework' (Henkel, 2000; Kogan, 2000), and simultaneously uses his or her

expertise to contribute to each COP to which he or she belongs. Their contributions are performed through various activities such as teaching, research, publications, presentation at conferences, and other intellectual discourses governed by the 'invisible colleges of [their] subject areas and disciplines' (Kogan, 2000, p. 211) and other COPs which they have chosen to participate in. Becoming an academic involves not only 'entering and coming to know' (Trowler and Knight, 2000; Tight, 2003), but also negotiating access, participating actively and continuously positioning themselves as full participants. Becoming an academic involves more than being taught explicitly about roles and responsibilities. The academics in this study practised, constructed and reconstructed the meaning of 'becoming an academic' throughout their academic careers. This finding is closely related to the work of Henkel (2000) and Kogan (2000). Henkel (2000, p. 16) views:

...the embedded individual academic as inheriting scripts for the fulfilment of a range of roles strongly determined by the communities and institutions of which he or she is a member.

In a similar vein, Kogan (2000, p. 210) suggests that:

People are stronger not only because of their expertise and their own moral and conceptual frameworks, but also by performing a range of roles, which are strongly determined by the communities and institutions of which they are members.

However, compared with suggestions made by Henkel (2000) and Kogan (2000), I suggest that the word 'scripts' actually refer to the provision of a broad and general framework of a shared practice. In other words, the phrases 'inherits script' and 'strongly

determined' do not indicate that there is no room for creativity on the part of the academics. The informants provided some examples of individual agency in fulfilling their roles as an academic. For them, becoming an academic was a constant process entrenched in power relations, ideology and culture within the various COPs that they participated in (Question 1b).

## **Research Question 2**

Instead of looking at an academic as a passive participant within the social structures provided by the communities that he or she belongs to, the findings provided evidence of the individual's agency in constructing his or her academic identity. An academic is both a sculptor and a sculpture of his or her academic identity. The construction of one's academic identity involves the dynamic interaction between individual projects and the rules determined by his or her COPs.

The central driving force in identity transformation is the agency of the individual academic rather than an 'academic identity' that is given by each respective academic discipline as a form of indoctrination. It is undeniable that eventually 'the rules of the game' (Bourdieu, 1988) are shaped by the disciplinary culture (Clark, 1987; Henkel, 2000). An extremist understanding of this suggestion might view academics as passive participants who will just replicate previous practices as part of reproducing their respective disciplinary cultures. However, while recognising the power of culture to shape the academic identity of the individuals, this study suggests that there is always room for individual agency.



The formation of one's academic identity involves a combination of one's individual project and one's fulfilment of roles that are strongly determined by one's COPs and institutions. The academics in this study stressed that the process is not a passive act of being absorbed or moulded by one's academic discipline. Instead, it involves an active and reciprocal interaction between the individual academics and their COPs. Success in career depends on one's ability to gain access to participate in more complex activities. Gaining access involves an interaction among academics' individual self-directed projects or 'self-designed apprenticeship' (Arthur et al., 1999), the 'guided learning through work' (Billett, 2002) and structures provided by the various COPs in academia. Becoming a competent academic requires one to master the 'knowing how' to do the job (procedural), 'knowing why' one is doing the job (meaning) and 'knowing whom' (relationship) in one's academic career (Arthur et al., 1999). These career competencies were mastered through the academics' continuous exposure to diverse cues and experiences.

### **Research Question 3**

From the career stories, it seemed that the formal education and training that the academics had received contributed only part of their preparation for developing their academic identities. A lot more was learnt and acquired through their participation in work-based practices. The academics in this study learnt that networking and mentoring are two important activities for their academic development. They described their search for exposure to diverse social activities and practices. The significant point of this finding was that experiences in the everyday work context play an important role in the

construction of one's identity. The exposure to a variety of social interactions, events and experiences expands the opportunities to advance in one's career.

#### **Research Question 4**

The findings of the study also revealed how COPs in academia, such as the 'invisible college' of the subject areas, colleagues at the department, faculty and university, professional associations, and people from other professions contribute to the construction of an academic's identity. These COPs have their particular shared understanding and ways of approaching academic work practice. Informants gave some evidence of how these COPs provided them with some frameworks. Academics learnt to negotiate and gained recognition within academia through the use of appropriate language and action suited to the culture of each COP in which they chose to participate.

The academics in the study highlighted that their active participation in various COPs significantly helped them to advance in their academic careers. Novices learn to master their practice by listening to and modelling other colleagues' ways of doing things. Responses and feedback from others provide a rich context for the novices to make sense of the activities undertaken. The feedback also presents them with a broad understanding of what it is like to become an academic. Active engagement in various COPs enabled the academics to search and discover the informal and tacit processes involved in an academic career. 'The concept of a "community of practice" provides the avenue for mutual engagement to integrate and renew the definition of competence and the production of experience' (Wenger, 1998, p. 214).

A COP provides both newcomers and experienced members with access to both competence and an experience of becoming an academic. Through mentoring and networking, a COP offers access to newcomers and the more experienced members to reappraise their competence and experience through three dimensions of competence namely 'mutuality of engagement, accountability to the enterprise and negotiability of the repertoire' (Wenger, 1998, pp. 152-153). Membership provides an 'intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge, not least because it provides the interpretive support necessary for making sense of its heritage' (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 98). Members who share a common practice engage in common social activities such as conferencing, writing and editing for journals, external examining and writing references, to name a few. They interact, argue and support each other. The academics' individual and social identities and the continuous process of becoming an academic were enacted through participating within various COPs in academia. The academics in this study learnt to develop their mastery of practice and reputation, and constantly constructed their identities through becoming active participants.

### **Research Question 5**

By reflecting on their career experiences, the academics in this study provided their perceptions towards the implementation of continuing professional development (CPD) in academia. They highlighted that providing a rich and resourceful context to oneself is the key to their career success. According to the informants, becoming an academic requires an individual to continuously update knowledge of his or her academic discipline, and awareness of how the university works within the national and



international higher education framework. Being aware of the current needs and expectations of their academic disciplines, institutions and nation enabled the academics to manage how they can participate and contribute within the whole system. They agreed that CPD activities in higher education institutions are essential for academics. However, they pointed out that the implementation of CPD should not be too structured. The system should remain dynamic and flexible so that academics are given a general framework yet sufficient freedom, time and space to innovate, to express their creativity, to contribute to their academic disciplines and to self-design their career undertakings.

Formal developmental activities such as off-the-job training programmes and informal developmental activities such as mentoring and networking enabled the academics to share their experiences with their colleagues. The sharing of experiences provided the academics with the formal, informal and tacit knowledge on how they can develop their careers.

In practice, the academics also suggested that CPD in academia is more likely to be effective when it is continuous, reflective, department-based and focused upon the needs of each academic discipline. They highlighted that the implementation of CPD for academics should consider the varied interests and instrumentation across different academic disciplines. Despite their appreciation for the significant contribution of formal and centralised CPD activities provided by the university, the academics felt that an effective CPD in academia should derive from a collaborative effort between the central academic development agency and each respective academic department. They believed

that a collaborative CPD, which encompasses both formal and informal developmental activities, might provide them with knowledge that is highly context-dependent, and at the same time allow them to reflect and to gain new perspectives through working with others from different academic disciplines.

A significant conclusion of the study is that the informants continuously learnt to position themselves in a process embedded with power relations, ideology and culture within various COPs that they participated in throughout their academic careers. Progressing from a lecturer to a professor only represents the identifiable objective dimension of one's career. Significantly, intertwined within this identifiable position is the subjective dimension of career, which involves recognition and transformation of one's identity as an academic.

### **7.3 Literature contribution**

This study has provided some contribution to the literature on academic work, academic and/or professional socialisation and organisational/workplace learning. In doing so, it also analysed the extent to which the communities of practice (COPs) (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) theoretical framework is helpful for discussions of academic work, academic and/or professional socialisation and learning at work.

First, even though research on academic work, particularly on academic development and academic career, is becoming of increasing interest and has been studied from various perspectives, there remains a need to explore career experiences from the point of view of

academics themselves. I was interested in the question of ‘is it that particular kinds of people choose certain sorts of disciplines and bring particular things with them, or is it rather that disciplines shape and condition their adherents into becoming particular kinds of people?’ (Becher and Trowler, 2001, p. 131). Despite a growing literature written on this academic socialisation debate, most seemed to focus on researching the experience of new faculty in becoming an academic (Boice, 1991; Mullen and Forbes, 2000; Trowler and Knight, 2000; Cawyer et al., 2002; Clark et al., 2002).

Little has been researched on the socialisation of senior academics. Although there are some literatures written on experienced academics, these writings were centred more on exploring their specific managerial roles and responsibilities (Middlehurst, 1993; Halsey, 1995; Richards, 1997; Prichard, 2000). None of these studies described the experiences of academics moving through academic socialisation at different stages in their careers.

Research into the experiences of academics at different stages in their careers still remains both limited and under-theorised (Tight, 2002, 2003). Little consideration has been given into looking at academics as social beings and highlighting how academic socialisation facilitated the construction of academic identity. This study was aimed at filling this gap. From a new perspective, this study contributes to the literature by providing an analysis of the experiences of academics moving through different stages in their careers.



Second, I have explored the career experiences of academics based upon a combined theorisation between a Chicagoan concept of a career, and communities of practice model (COPs) (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). This theorisation has a number of advantages:

- It allows for an understanding of the academic's position within a COP as a process of identity negotiation. Learning in the form of participation in various COPs becomes the vehicle for the evolution and continuous renewal of one's mastery, reputation and identity.
- It recognises that the COPs in academic lives are not fixed. This means that an individual's position in those communities and how many communities he or she belongs to can change over time.
- It highlights that career progression and 'investment of time' (Bourdieu, 1988) is not just a passing of years and a passive venture. It involves continuous mutual learning and negotiating for recognition among members in various COPs. Becoming a full participant in established COPs clearly provides an individual with greater opportunities for developing contacts and a positive reputation. The ability to create one's learning pathway depends on the individual's capacity to gain access to 'learning-intensive relations' (Stevens, 1996).

However, despite the strengths and practical use of the COPs framework in discussing learning at work, the model also has some limitations that need to be addressed. First, Lave and Wenger's (1991) suggestion about legitimate peripheral learning and moving from a novice to an expert needs some further clarifications. Legitimate peripheral participation should be seen as describing how people learn at work and not how people move on or progress with their careers. Learning in one's career is an ongoing and a continuous process. It is not linear and is always incomplete. This study suggests that becoming a professor is not the destination of an academic's career. Professorship is actually the means to continue with one's work and to convince others of one's ability. Academic identity is dynamic, contested and is transformed continuously. This study has provided some examples of individuals who continued to learn even after getting their professorship. Thus, becoming a professor should not be seen as becoming a full participant because it is continuously contested and negotiated.

Second, the COPs framework was focused very much on participating and learning on the job. It overlooks the importance of formal developmental activities in workplace learning. Despite supporting the concept of learning as social participation in COPs, the findings of the study also validated the significant contribution of formal developmental activities that enable academics to reflect on their actions and gain new perspectives from others.

#### 7.4 Methodological contribution

This study investigates academics' experiences at different stages in their careers. Using in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviewing interviews, documentary analysis and a literature review enabled me to explore and expose the uniqueness of particular transformation of academic identities, while locating the academics within their career experiences. Within these patterns there were many individual variations, and these variations were highly significant. This section outlines three features in the study's methodological approach.

First, despite some criticisms of interviews as providing snapshots of the real experience, the use of biographical approach in this study provided a retrospective view of exploring the academics' career experiences. I am aware that a longitudinal study on the experiences of academics moving at different stages in their careers may provide significant findings on academic socialisation. However, this approach may take many years to complete. It would not be suitable for a three-year doctoral study. Thus, an in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviewing to explore the individual narratives of career stories, as adopted in this study, was practical yet insightful in offering a better understanding of the kinds of successes and failures these academics experienced throughout their careers. The exploration considered both the objective and subjective dimensions of career, using the concept of meaningful work, which forms a person's identity (Sikes et al., 1985; Barley, 1989). My intention of using career stories as data, which were generated from semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis, was to



enable readers to experience the career journey towards becoming a professor in a British higher education context.

Second, the series of in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews enabled me to construct close relationships with the informants. The access that I had developed throughout the research enabled me to gain evidence on how these academics experienced and made sense of the academic lives in which they lived. Instead of getting a snapshot representation of their experiences, my series of in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews allowed me to relate to the issues raised by the academics in the study. The approach adopted in this study seemed suitable for the aim of exploring and providing an illustrative insight into how individuals travelled and moved on in academia.

Third, adaptability in research is significant in studying academic career and career experiences in particular. This study which combines methods, including in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews and documentary analysis thoroughly explore the career experiences of academics moving at different stages in their careers.

In short, a particular methodological contribution of this study lies in its depth, through the use of in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews and documentary analysis.

‘Who and what we are depends on who and what we have been, on the experiences we have had and on the consequent attitudes and values that we hold. Our past contributes to our present and, thereby, to our future’ (Sikes and Everington, 2004, p. 24). In order to

gain a sense of how people have come to be professors, it was their perceptions that had to be the focus. A significant product of this study is its documentation of the successful experiences of professors moving through different stages in their careers. Their autobiographical accounts enable readers to understand their motivations, their career choices, the challenges they have encountered, the reasons for their successes and failures, and the way they perceive themselves. The use of in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews and documentary analysis, which are backed by a literature review, provide a more personal and insightful view into the career experiences of these professors.

## **7.5 Limitations of the study and recommendations for future research**

The following are some limitations of the study. These limitations also provide some recommendations for future research.

### **7.5.1 Limited research sampling**

Twelve professors from 12 academic departments were interviewed. Although more professors from various disciplines and various universities would have been involved, the number interviewed was still representative of all the professors working for the University of Warwick. The study could only involve interviewing professors from 12 departments within four faculties of a university. This approach was convenient for exploring in depth the career experiences of those professors involved.

### **7.5.2 Relying on an in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviewing and the need for a much wider life history approach**

Another limitation of this study was that the analysis was based on an in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviewing approach. Future development of this research could also employ a much wider life history approach as another way of analysing and capturing the whole identity of the professors. One of the ways is to look into the recurrent patterns cutting across various disciplines and various universities. With different research sites, it is likely that the findings, with their own idiosyncrasies, differences and similarities, can add to the findings highlighted in the present study.

### **7.5.3 Managing research biases**

Career progresses over time and people's perception towards their life events may become richer and fuller from time to time. In this study, the in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interview responses were biased by the interviewees' current understanding, concern and dispositions towards their academic careers. Using a retrospective approach to researching career brings with it the issue of memory that were observed to happen among some of the academics. They seemed to elaborate more on the good picture about their careers. Some did share their 'bad days' but some did not elaborate too much on their failures and bad experiences. A longitudinal study would be appropriate to study the academics for a substantial amount of time in order to explore the progression of academics at different stages in their careers. As a researcher, I acknowledge that I could not know whether the academics in this study were telling me the whole truth about themselves. However, in this research, the focus was on how the stories interpret and



construct the experiences and perceptions of individuals. It was not focused on whether the stories as verbal descriptions corresponded to a situation as it actually happened (Valkeavaara, 1999). It is impossible to use verbal description to represent an exact situation in life. However, story telling was one of the opportunities available for the researcher and the informants to make interpretations based on the stories told. Thus, instead of looking at the validity of facts, my aim in the study was to obtain viable descriptions of events in people's lives.

### **7.6 Recommendations for future practice**

The following are some recommendations which may facilitate the professional socialisation process among academics in general. These recommendations were made by the academics in the study.

- Individual academics should develop a broad understanding of how the higher education system works and how they could relate to this system.
  
- Individual academics should learn to negotiate access into various COPs via activities such as research, teaching, writing, managing and networking throughout their academic careers.

- Individual academics and institutions could jointly form a rich context for making explicit the informal and tacit processes in academia through activities such as apprenticeship, mentoring and networking.
  
- Institutions could document empirical findings and develop a database that can facilitate the mastery of academic practice that relates to ways of knowing namely; knowing why, knowing how and knowing whom in diverse contexts and fields of study.
  
- Individual academics, special interest groups and institutions could provide more opportunities for continuous mutual learning among academics at all levels so as to increase their understanding and ability to ensure that collegiality in academia works successfully.

## **7.7 Summary of the chapter**

This study contributed towards a greater understanding of the experiences of academics moving at different stages in their careers. It described and analysed the challenges and successes experienced by the academics in this study as they progressed throughout their careers. In retrospect, the answers to my research questions enabled me to explore and organise my conclusion. They strengthened the thesis of this study that a successful academic career does not only depend on one's academic and pedagogic qualifications, but also relies on one's ability to socialise within various COPs. Stories as told by

established professors provided the learning pathways not only for me as a novice academic but also for others in navigating their own academic careers.



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Appendix A:

A Sample of the Interview Analysis

Extract From Interview With Professor Derek Social

Code	Interview Transcript
MEANOFPROF ←	<p>Interview Question (<i>Ismi</i>):</p> <p>Well, I am going to ask you a very significant question. What does it mean to become an academic and/or a professor?</p> <p><i>Professor Derek Social:</i></p> <p>On becoming a professor, I believe that it denotes <u>recognition by peers</u> and <u>recognition by the academic system</u>. You are respected for your <u>expertise</u> in the field. It is an <u>achievement</u>, a <u>status</u> and it denotes <u>seniority</u>. It is normally gained through research and teaching. You are recognised as an <u>expert</u> in your field by your peers nationally and internationally. It also denotes a <u>leadership and administrative</u> role. You provide some <u>leadership in your field and in your department</u>, in <u>bringing in</u> younger staff, in <u>inspiring</u> your colleagues and in <u>encouraging them to develop</u>. The professor has a wider function being an <u>authority</u> to speak broadly on his or her field of study.</p>
MEANOFPROF/RECOG [recognition] [expertise] [achievement] [status] [seniority] [expert]	
MEANOFPROF/LEAD [leadership] [administrative] [developing others] [authority]	

**Appendix B:**  
**Coding, categorizing and developing themes**

(Explanatory Proposition)  
**‘Becoming An Academic: Gaining Recognition In Academia’**

1. (Conceptual Category) Moving into academia: Developing the interest (DEVINTRES)
2. (Conceptual Category) Gaining recognition in academia (GAINRECOG)
  - a. (Main theme) Moving into the academic communities: Legitimate peripheral participation (MOVINTOCOM)
  - b. (Main theme) Sustaining one’s recognition within academia: Becoming a full practitioner (SUSTARECOG)
3. (Conceptual Category) Learning throughout one’s career (LEARNTOCAREER)
  - a. (Main theme) Learning through engaging with ongoing work practice (ONGOIWORK)
  - b. (Main theme) Learning through reflecting on past experiences (REFLECT)
    - i. (Sub theme) Learning through improvisation and adaptation (IMPRODAPT)
    - ii. (Sub theme) Learning through working at various places (WORKVAPLA)
  - c. (Main theme) Learning through working with others (WORKWITHERS)
    - i. (Sub theme) Mentoring (MENTOR)
    - ii. (Sub theme) Networking (NETWORK)
    - iii. (Sub theme) Research groups (RESGROUP)
  - d. (Main theme) Learning through developing new ideas and new structures (NEWIDEATURE)
    - i. (Sub theme) Learning through innovating (INNOVATE)
    - ii. (Sub theme) Learning through developing new research areas: Being one of the early scholars in the subject area in the UK (DEVNEWAREA)
    - iii. (Sub theme) Learning through connecting theory to practice (THEOTOPRAC)
4. (Conceptual Category) Challenges in developing one’s career (CHALLENGES)
5. (Conceptual Category) Coping strategies (COPING)

**Appendix B (Continued):  
Coding, categorizing and developing themes**

(Explanatory Proposition)

**‘Moving on in Academia: The Construction of Academic Identity’**

1. (Conceptual Category) Academic identity: What does it mean to become an academic and/or a professor? (MEANOFPROF)
  - a. (Main theme) What it is like to become a professor? (BECOMPROF)
  - b. (Main theme) Informants’ views of a successful academic (SUCCESSACA)
  - c. (Main theme) The quest: What do the professors want to achieve in their careers? (THEQUEST)
  
2. (Conceptual Category) Academic identity: How does it get constructed? (ACADENTICONS)
  - a. (Main theme) Learning to play the game, role-playing and personifying (PLAYGAME) (ROLEPLAY) (PERSONIFY)
  - b. (Main theme) Self-designed apprenticeship and guided learning through work (SELFDESAPP) (GUIDLENTOWORK)
  - c. (Main theme) Academic identity: A sculpture or a sculptor? (SCULPTURE) (SCULPTOR)
  
3. (Conceptual Category) Informants’ perceptions towards the implementation of continuing professional development in academia (PERCEIVECPD)